

June 2020



NEXUS



NEW ACT LEADERS

entering leadership in a
crisis

COVID 19

what are we thinking

WHAT TO READ

quarantine books

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to a special COVID edition of NEXUS. It is a bumper issue with several reflections submitted in a quick turnaround. This was meant to be an issue on Leadership. The theme is gone, but there were quite a few new ACT leaders to profile, including new Dean Dr James Dalziel, who has been in the role less than a week as of writing.

The issue starts with the now regular NEXUS Bookshelf, where I bring to your attention books on a theme. With astonishing speed, several well-known authors and others have already published books on COVID – take a look!

Events are starting to get put on the schedule again, and some have gone online – take a look but maybe pencil it in.

I've got no less than six COVID articles spanning online education, to theological musings, as well as a couple of trips overseas to see how it is affecting other places. Thank you to all the authors who worked quickly to get these to you.

I've also incorporated a new section. The monthly updates recently have included links to online articles of interest, which have been well received, so I have decided to make this regular to keep track of all the interesting reflections ACT people put out there online.

Finally, words of appreciation from me and all of us at the ACT: we have been in awe of the hard work, creativity and love that have gone into the COVID responses of not only our ACT colleges but also the sector more generally. We have been praying for you

every work day at 10:15, and plan to continue. We have also given every college a prayer partner. So, with much sincerity,

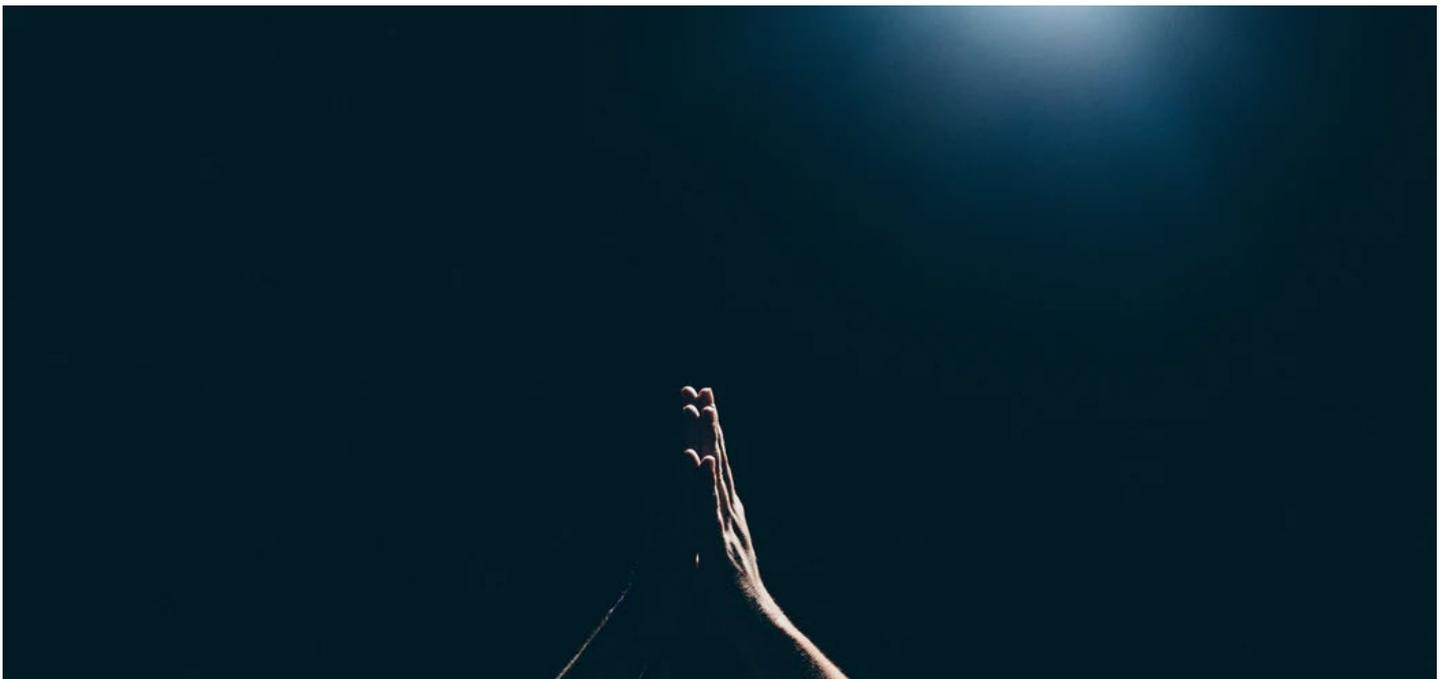
Yours in prayer,

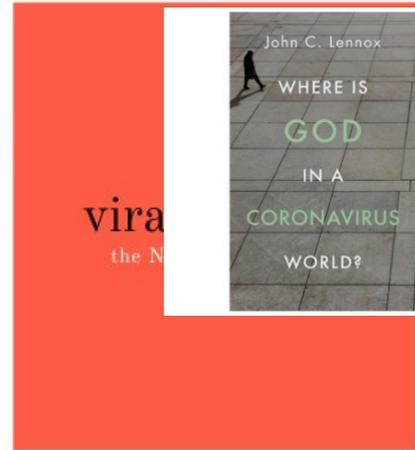
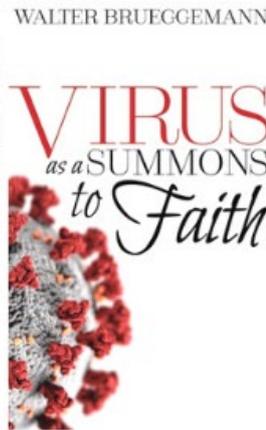
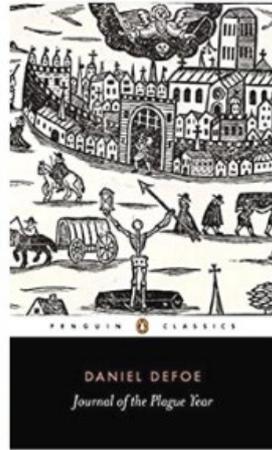
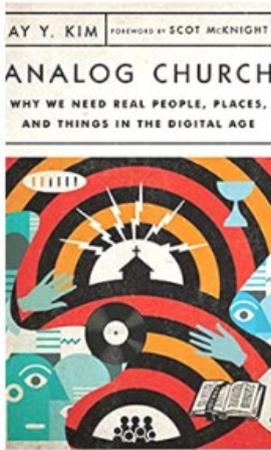
Megan Powell du Toit

NEXUS Editor

Publishing Manager

Editor of Colloquium



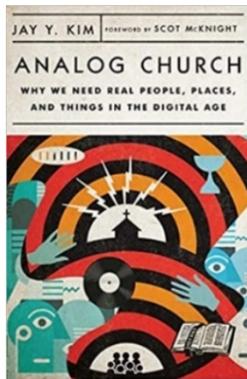


I have rounded up some recent releases which are of particular interest to the current moment, as well as a fictionalised account of a previous pandemic. Note that the descriptions below are all from the publishers.

March 2020

[Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age by Jay Y. Kim, IVP.](#)

What does it mean to be an analog church in a digital age? In recent decades the digital world has taken over our society at nearly every level, and the church has increasingly followed suit—often in ways we're not fully aware of. But as even the culture at large begins to reckon with the limits of a digital world, it's time for the church to take stock. Are online churches, video venues, and brighter lights truly the future? What about the digital age's effect on discipleship, community, and the Bible? As a pastor in Silicon Valley, Jay Kim has experienced the digital church in all its splendour. In *Analog Church*, he grapples with the ramifications of a digital church, from our worship and experience of Christian community to the way we engage Scripture and sacrament. Could it be that in our efforts to stay relevant in our digital age, we've begun to give away the very thing that our age most desperately needs: transcendence? Could it be that the best way to reach new generations is in fact found in a more timeless path? Could it be that at its heart, the church has really been analog all along?



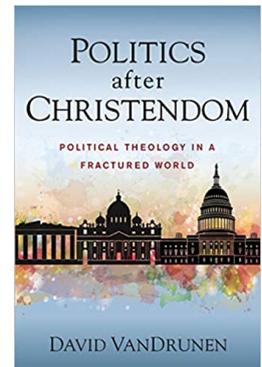
April 2020

[Where is God in a Coronavirus World? by John Lennox, Good Book Company.](#)

In this short yet profound book, Oxford mathematics professor John Lennox examines the coronavirus in light of various belief systems and shows how the Christian worldview not only helps us to make sense of it, but also offers us a sure and certain hope to cling to.

[Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World, by David VanDrunen, Zondervan.](#)

For more than a millennium, beginning in the early Middle Ages, most Western Christians lived in societies that sought to be comprehensively Christian—ecclesiastically, economically, legally, and politically. That is to say, most Western Christians lived in Christendom. But in a gradual process beginning a few hundred years ago, Christendom weakened and finally crumbled. Today, most Christians in the world live in pluralistic political communities. And Christians themselves have very different opinions about what to make of the demise of Christendom and how to understand their status and responsibilities in a post-Christendom world.



Politics After Christendom argues that Scripture leaves Christians well-equipped for living in a world such as this. Scripture gives no indication that Christians should strive to establish some version of Christendom. Instead, it prepares them to live in societies that are indifferent or hostile to Christianity, societies in which believers must live faithful lives as sojourners and exiles. *Politics After Christendom* explains what Scripture teaches about political community and about Christians' responsibilities within their own communities.

As it pursues this task, *Politics After Christendom* makes use of several important theological ideas that Christian thinkers have developed over the centuries. These ideas include Augustine's Two-Cities concept, the

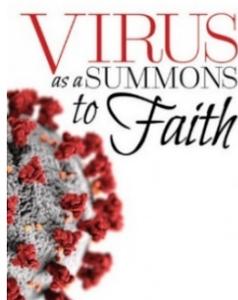
Reformation Two-Kingdoms category, natural law, and a theology of the biblical covenants. Politics After Christendom brings these ideas together in a distinctive way to present a model for Christian political engagement.

May 2020

[Virus as a Summons to Faith, by Walter Brueggemann, Cascade.](#)

Why bother with the interpretive categories of biblical faith when in fact our energy and interest are focused on more immediate matters? The answer is simple and obvious. We linger because, in the midst of our

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN



immediate preoccupation with our felt jeopardy and our hope for relief, our imagination does indeed range beyond the immediate to larger, deeper wonderments. Our free-ranging imagination is not finally or fully contained in the immediacy of our stress, anxiety, and jeopardy. Beyond these demanding immediacies, we have a deep

sense that our life is not fully contained in the cause-and-effect reasoning of the Enlightenment that seeks to explain and control. There is *more than that* and *other than that* to our life in God's world!

[Healthy Faith and the Coronavirus Crisis, edited by Luke Cawley & Kristi Mair, IVP.](#)

COVID-19 has transformed our everyday lives. It's as if another world has arrived in the blink of an eye. Yet life is not on pause. We still need to live. The pandemic, like any other time, is a moment both of opportunity as well as challenge.

This book is a briefing on how to thrive in a world of restrictions. Twenty leading Christian thinkers have come together to help you begin to navigate this strange reality.

Each contributor writes on their area of expertise, and topics covered include prayer, loneliness, work, singleness, marriage, parenting, grief, death, imagination, conversations, humour, and much more. They offer practical advice as well as helpful perspective from Scripture.

This is an essential resource for anyone looking to cultivate a healthy faith which infuses all areas of life during this disorienting time.

Contributors: Andy Bannister, NT Wright (Author), Krish Kandiah, Kate Wharton, Rachel Turner, Cal Bailey, Daniel Strange, Ed Shaw, John Wyatt, Richard Winter, Matt Searles, Jill Weber, Mark Meynell, Andy Kind, Paul

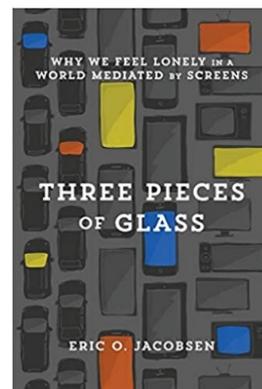
Copan, Pablo Martinez, Derek Tidball, Dianne Tidball, Ed Creedy.

[Three Pieces of Glass: Why We Feel Lonely in a World Mediated by Screens, by Eric Jacobsen, Brazos.](#)

Loneliness is increasingly recognised as a major public health crisis that is on the rise and impacting people of all ages. Addressing the crisis of loneliness from a fresh perspective, this book introduces belonging as an overlooked but critical aspect of a flourishing Christian life.

Eric Jacobsen shows how three pieces of glass--the car windshield, TV, and smartphone--are emblematic of significant societal shifts that have created a cultural habit of physical isolation.

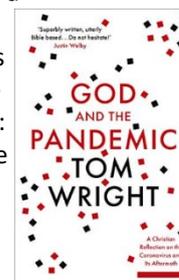
We feel increasingly disconnected from the people and places around us. Jacobsen explains how adopting everyday practices and making changes in our neighbourhoods can help us create a sense of belonging and rediscover what belonging in a place looks like. In order to effectively solve the problem of loneliness, we need to recover patterns and practices of community life that encourage us to form meaningful connections with people and stories that are part of the places where we live, work, and worship. To this end, Jacobsen offers four redemptive strategies for living a more intentional and spiritual life.



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[N.T. Wright – God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath, SPCK](#)

What are we supposed to think about the coronavirus crisis? Some people think they know: 'This is a sign of the End,' they say. 'It's all predicted in the book of Revelation.' Others disagree but are equally clear: 'This is a call to repent. God is judging the world and through this disease he's telling us to change.' Some join in the chorus of blame and condemnation: 'It's the fault of the Chinese, the government, the World Health Organization...'



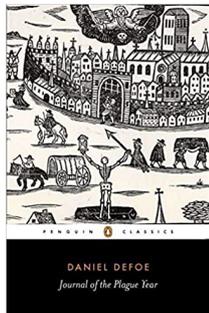
Tom Wright examines these reactions to the virus and finds them wanting. Instead, he invites you to consider a different way of seeing and responding – a way that draws on the teachings and examples of scripture, and

above all on the way of living, thinking and praying revealed to us by Jesus.

From the vault:

[*A Journal of The Plague Year*, by Daniel Defoe, Penguin Classics.](#)

In 1665 the plague swept through London, claiming over 97,000 lives. Daniel Defoe was just five at the time of the plague, but he later called on his own memories, as well as his writing experience, to create this vivid chronicle of the epidemic and its victims. 'A Journal' (1722) follows Defoe's fictional narrator as he traces the devastating progress of the plague through the streets of London. Here we see a city transformed- some of its streets suspiciously empty, some - with crosses on their doors - overwhelmingly full of the sounds and smells of human suffering. And every living citizen he meets has a horrifying story that demands to be heard.



CALL FOR PAPERS

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

EVENTS

Due to COVID, check with organisers closer to the date.

Consortium

June

10 Youthworks, NSW

[Gareth Crispin, Inter-generational Church, Family Ministry and Theology](#) webinar

20 Ridley, VIC

[Children's and Youth Ministry Virtual Training Day](#)

July

25 RTC, VIC

[Living Single: Gospel-Focused Thinking About the Single Life](#) webinar

September

23-24 RTC, VIC

[Preaching Conference 2020 | Preaching Deuteronomy \(may be online\)](#)

25 RTC, VIC

[Think Ministry 2020, Andrew and Heather Reid](#)

Beyond

June

10 Pilgrim, VIC

[Online Book Launch | Christian Doctrine: A Guide for the Perplexed, Geoff Thompson](#)

17 Alphacrucis, NSW

[Masterclass: Theology & Psychology. Nigel Pegram](#)

September

7-9, 9-11 Moore NSW

[John Chapman Preaching Clinics, Simon Manchester](#)

16 Moore, NSW

[Retiring for work: a lifetime serving the Lord, Peter and Christine Jensen](#)

17-19 ACU & CTC, VIC

[Flourishing and Wellbeing Conference](#)

October

28-29 SCD, NSW

[Research Writers Workshop open to SCD and ACT Faculty](#)



spiritual formation according to student needs. He cites Perry Shaw, Henri Nouwen, Dallas Willard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Augustine as diverse but important influences on his thinking in the area of spiritual formation.

However, he also cites his affection for the ACT as being part of his motivation to take on the role of Dean. He always liked what it stood for, a broad

The ACT has several new leaders. Our new Dean has just started, while three colleges have also had a recent change of principal.

New Dean

Dr James Dalziel

I sat down with new Dean, James, for a chat not long after he was appointed. I began by finding out his church background. He attends All Saints Anglican Church in North Epping and is a Synod representative for Sydney Diocese. But he also has spent time in different church expressions, such as house churches and Café church in Glebe, Sydney. Such a diversity is present in his academic background as well, as he started in Psychology, moved into Education (including technology), and now Theological Education.

I asked him why those moves. He began in psychology because of being interested in the question “what does it mean to be human?” As he started to teach Psychology, he discovered an interest in the process of education from a psychological viewpoint. Or as he puts it, an interest in “how do we learn as humans”. From there, he moved into thinking about technology for education. He also developed an interest in how character formation is part of education. He believes one of the biggest challenges of the higher education sector is how to include personal development within current degrees. His involvement in the SCD Learning and Teaching committee and then ACT Academic Board made it clear this was a significant question within theological education as well, so he saw a place for his experience and skills in our context. As Dean, he hopes to foreground spiritual formation. One way of doing that, he suggests, could be to provide different course pathways with options for more or less



evangelicalism, orthodox and biblical, with a focus on equipping the church. As he served on the ACT Academic Board, he grew in affection towards the ACT and its colleges.

Apart from his emphasis on spiritual formation, he also notes that with his background, the ACT could think about exploring Christian Education and Counselling as related disciplines. Of course, he will bring his significant experience in teaching and learning into our context, deepening faculty engagement with this in particular. As well, he hopes to bring fresh eyes to the matter of enrolment, looking at such initiatives as new pathways into degrees and further engagement with communities.

I got back to him recently to see whether he would add any insights arising from the COVID-19 situation. As someone who has been a researcher in technology in education, it wasn't surprising to hear he had been thinking about technology and the church. He says:

“I'd note the two-edged nature of technology for the Church during this time - in the absence of an alternative, technology has helped Christians keep up contact - for example, I've found video conferencing with my men's Bible study group very helpful. But this period of isolation has drawn attention to the importance of face to face contact (when it is healthy to do so!), and how much technology falls short of giving us a full experience of life together.”

We look forward to experiencing life together with James in the ACT!

New Principals

MAC: Rev Dr Katy Smith

Katy began at MAC as Principal in March. Most recently she was the SA & NT Director for CMS, and prior to that taught Old Testament at BCSA.

Katy's area of research is Exodus and Leviticus, an area she chose because of a need she saw for female evangelical Old Testament scholarship, and continuing significant questions about how the coherence of each book and in particular how to read Leviticus as



Christians.

When asked about what lies ahead at MAC, she mentions two key strategies. The first is strengthening their focus on training gospel centred women in mental health and pastoral care. They plan to broaden this program out to Australia. They are also taking on the challenge of building MAC into a graduate level college, while maintaining existing programs.

During this time of COVID, she says has "strengthened the conviction that we need to be training the next generation of Christian believers to enter into the brokenness of life and be equipped to show how the gospel is light, life, and hope within that brokenness."

RTC: Dr Philip Scheepers

Philip started at RTC in 2010. As well as his new appointment as Principal, he also lectures there in missions and church history.



Philip's first degree was in history and he also served as a missionary to for many years. His doctoral research was on the history of Islam in South Africa and what lessons can be learnt from the past to inform the

practice of Christian outreach to Muslims in southern Africa. As he says "I've always been interested in the interface between history and the practice of missions. Particularly since we seemingly so often feel the need to 'reinvent the wheel'!" He takes up the Principalship in a collere that moved in recent years to the Melbourne CBD. He sees his challenge as helping the college adapt to this new context while remaining true

to their heritage. When asked about insights during a time of COVID, he spoke about paradox. "On the one hand I was certainly stretched in envisioning what is possible in online theological education. And it turned out that it was much more than we imagined. On the other hand, I was strongly reminded of how essential the community element is in the personal and spiritual formation of our students."

SMBC: Dr Derek Brotherson

Derek commences Principal of SMBC on 1 July 2020. He was recently awarded an ACT PhD, for a thesis on contextualisation.

Derek won a university medal in law and then worked for the Australian Government Solicitor in Canberra for some years. A very different environment from theological education, though he



credits a female leader in that space as showing him how to lead by building up. He and his wife Anna have just come back from 10 years of ministry overseas. He says firsthand knowledge has deepened his appreciation for how God's word really does transform people. Because of that, when asked about his vision for theological education he describes it as "Being transformed by the word and taking that into the world in community and with humility." When asked specifically about his own context at SMBC, he notes that Australia has become a much more fearful place while he has been away, as society has changed, but he notes that the mission field has also changed. He hopes to equip people for a rapidly changing context both here and overseas. He also speaks about the need to give people a vision of hope.

When asked about insights from COVID, he said: "COVID has helped me to see the importance of having a purpose or goal-oriented approach to mission rather than just an activity-oriented one. It felt like everything changed so much in March, and it felt like everything had to stop. But actually, our God is still the same God and he continues to be building his kingdom."



ONLINE TEACHING IDEAS

JAMES DALZIEL

James Dalziel, our new Dean, has expertise in eLearning. As many colleges move to more online teaching, he offers this advice:

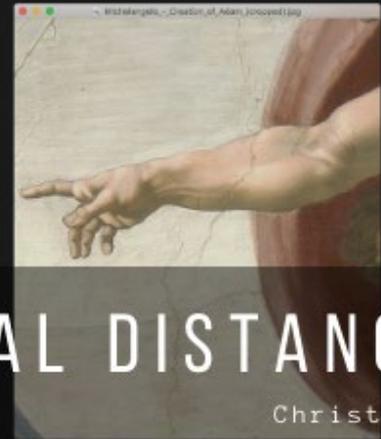
- Consider how to vary the types of online activities across sessions, e.g., recorded lectures, individual reading & worksheets, video-conferencing, student led teamwork, online research.
- Consider activities by time of day and day of week – more demanding activities are suitable for periods of higher student attention (middle of day, not Friday!)
- Extra scaffolding and “micro-structuring” of activities can avoid confusion and loss of focus.
- “Micro-structuring” = be more explicit about expectations at each step in an activity – spell out each task, the time involved, the number of words to be written.
- Partly structured templates can help – eg, Powerpoint with titles provided, but content for each slide to be completed by students
- To avoid wasted time on online research, give advice on where and how to search.
- Being overly directive may feel counter-intuitive as a lecturer, but it helps keep up student focus in these difficult circumstances.
- Most students are adept at online discussion with peers, so you can offer more freedom for

teamwork tasks, including letting students use their preferred collaborative technologies (as long as these are used safely).

- Try to bring the daily life of students at home into your video-conferences – eg, have a number of (different) students share something they have been doing at home that is related to the class. This helps students understand everyone is in a similar situation, builds community and empathy, and can lower distress.
- There are great teaching resources ideas freely shared on the internet – don’t be afraid to re-use the good ideas of other lecturers (and maybe contribute one of your own!).
- Be aware that some students may be suffering during current circumstances– so provide opportunities for individual contact (email, video). Consider praying for your students and their families.
- Consider including tasks away from a screen – many students are getting too much screen time overall at this time.
- Where relevant, consider activities such as reading books, interviewing family members, taking photos of house/garden, exercise, etc.

Staying Sane as a Lecturer

- Teaching during Covid19 is a marathon, not a sprint, so pace yourself to ensure you can spread your effort over the long term, rather than putting huge amounts of effort into a single session (meaning other sessions suffer)
- It’s hard to accept, but Covid19 will damage the education of students, and while lecturers will work very hard to limit this, there is only so much “retrieval” of normal education outcomes that can be achieved.
- Many educators are perfectionists, which can be great for student learning in normal times, but demoralising and depressing when you can’t live up to the very high standards you normally set. Please go easy on yourself.



THE GOD OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

Christoph Oets

By now, the majority of the world population is aware of the need to practice social distancing (perhaps better called physical distancing). By itself this globally shared experience would be enough to prompt us to theological reflection. But what makes this more extraordinary is that the reason for keeping your distance is concern for fellow human beings. Essentially, we have been asked to distance ourselves physically from one another out of love. This practice is certainly at odds with our normal expressions of love.

The question then is how to approach this counterintuitive phenomenon theologically. And so, this is an opportunity to reflect on (and proclaim) how the One Who is Love (1 John 4:8,16) may also at times keep physically distant from those He loves because of love.

Distancing in Scripture

A number of key passages in Scripture reveal a god who actively distances himself from those he cares for. And that not only because humanity might be sinful.

For example, in the book of Exodus we encounter a god of compassion, of love (*hesed*), and jealousy (34:6) who hides Moses in the cleft of a rock so that he can pass by (33:11, 23–33). We see a relational god (3:6), who nevertheless decrees boundaries to be set up to prevent Israel, his firstborn (4:22), to come near him (19:12, 24:1–2, 26:1–37). He resides in flame, cloud, or behind a veil (19:9, 26:31–33).

The prophet Isaiah can call out: “Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, Oh God of Israel, Saviour!” (45:15). This distancing can indeed be a consequence of sin, for “our iniquities have made a separation (...) and your

sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear” (59:2). But this is not the only reason a holy God might hide his face. The Psalmists lament the experience of God being far, of hiding his face, of being distant.¹ There this distance is usually not because of sin, rather the prayer often comes from a place of oppression, even righteousness.

When we turn to the New Testament we equally find traces of God’s distancing. Jesus speaks of the Father as one who is in secret (Matt 6:6, 18). Jesus in fact attests that “no one has seen God” (John 1:18). And Paul acknowledges that God is unapproachable and cannot be seen (1 Tim 6:16). He is only indirectly recognisable through his invisible attributes (Rom 1:20).

Then, in the ultimate “coming near” of God, the incarnation, we find that the Son of God, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), had to empty himself in order to be close (Phil 2:7). In other words, he distanced himself from himself. And it is in this humble form that the Son experiences the ultimate distancing of God, crying out on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46).

This twofold divine distancing of originates in a double love: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16), whereas the Son in turn obeys the Father’s command out of love for Him: “I am doing just what the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (John 14:31). Jesus and the Father distancing themselves from each other are both acts of love and originate in a god who is love.

¹ Psalm 10:1, 13:1, 27:9, 30:7, 44:24, 69:17, 88:14, 89:46, 102:2, 104:29, 143:7, et al.

Distancing and the Nature of Love

So, the Scriptures reveal a covenant keeping god of love who nevertheless can be distant. If we are serious about the revelation that God is love then his self-distancing must be evaluated in some measure as an aspect of his love.

It is helpful here to consider the Jewish principle of *Zimzum*, a concept usually advanced by kenotic theologians, most famously by Jürgen Moltmann.² Essentially developed by the sixteen century Kabbalist mystic Isaac Luria, *Zimzum* refers to a self-contraction or self-concentration of God into himself before he the act of creation. God reduces himself “away from a point” so that something that is not God can have space and time to exist. The one who is ‘all in all’ “makes space” for creation, for ‘in him we live and move and exist’ (Acts 17:28). The Jewish philosopher Gershom Scholem explains, ‘God was compelled to make room for the world by, as it were, abandoning a region within Himself.’³

We might restate this for our purposes here; God “making space” in himself means God is self-distancing himself and subsequently from others to “make space” for the other.⁴ As has been argued, it is God’s nature of love that makes this self-distancing intrinsic to God, and is therefore seen in God, namely in the Trinity of three distinct persons (as, e.g., explored by Richard of St Victor), but equally in creation.⁵

Zimzum might initially seem abstract, but it has connections with our experience. When a couple has children, they inevitably reduce their own freedom and yet at the same time make more space in various ways to allow something new to be created. The mother in fact “makes space” in herself for this new being to exist, and equally experiences emotional loss, a kind of distancing, after birth. Parents give up time, space, money, nerves, sleep, peace, quiet and a lot of other comforts. They bind the rest of their existence to this new being, which they increasingly have to distance themselves from as they teach it to become a functioning adult. It is strange and irrational — it is love. For love is able to increase by decreasing, to become more and not less when something is abundantly given, including distance. This giving of distance and self-distancing is as such nothing

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 111.

³ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), 261.

⁴ If *Zimzum* is felt to be too problematic, Nicholas of Cusa’s (complicated) notion of creation as an ‘unfolding of God’ (*explicatio dei*) might offer an alternative whereby the universe is seen as a *contracted* reflection of God’s being

unfamiliar to love and already given in God and creation itself.

Moreover, God’s distancing himself out of love for humans touches another area of existence. It is paradoxically felt in that God makes himself appear absent. For God does not force his presence (and power) upon us. He rather suffers to be overheard, overlooked, misinterpreted, doubted, raged against, driven out, send away, even killed. For not only would his unmediated presence vanquish us, God’s overt presence would rob us of choice. A key element of love is not imposing oneself on the other. Love waits until it is called for. Love hides, gives space, gives distance to let the other be. Distance makes love possible, and at times, love demands distance. This then is felt in a seeming absence of God in personal experience and history.

This aspect of God’s love-motivated distancing could be what Blaise Pascal refers to as the “dignity of causality.”⁶ If God was overwhelmingly overt and controlling in human experience, human choice would be made nigh impossible; more so, human responsibility, motivation, or activity would be all but become unnecessary. We would seek the gifts over the giver, we would make God king because he gives us bread, not because we would seek him to reciprocate his love. Effectively, that means we live in a world where seemingly independent causes create the illusion of God’s absence. Yet, this overt, natural



causality only shrouds the cause of all causes, ‘though

(*contractio dei*), see esp. *De docta ignorantia* II. This would still entail the notion distance, either between the reflection and god himself, or in what is en/unfolded.

⁵ See, e.g., the essays in John C. Polkinghorne, ed., *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

⁶ Blaise Pascale, *Pensées* (DPC; Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003 [New York Dutton, 1958]), 140 (§512).

He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist' (Acts 21:27–28).

Distancing and Opportunity

All this then might allow us to reflect on how agonising but necessary it might be for God to keep his distance. Much like the COVID-19 pandemic requires us to keep our distance from one another, God out of love appears to keep himself distant from us. Just as we might distinguish physical from social distancing, God keeps himself distant metaphysically in some respects, while coming close to us spiritually in Christ. The ultimate motivation for both these cases of distancing is, however, the same: love.⁷

Perhaps this global experience of love -motivated self-distancing is an opportunity that allows us to explain God and his creation to others in a new way. These insights help us to deal with God's seeming absence. Maybe God himself "suffers" the magnitude of his own love, inasmuch as we have to endure separation from him. In any case, God's distance or seeming absence does not have to mean God does not love us, it might mean precisely the opposite. And that is a hopeful thought.

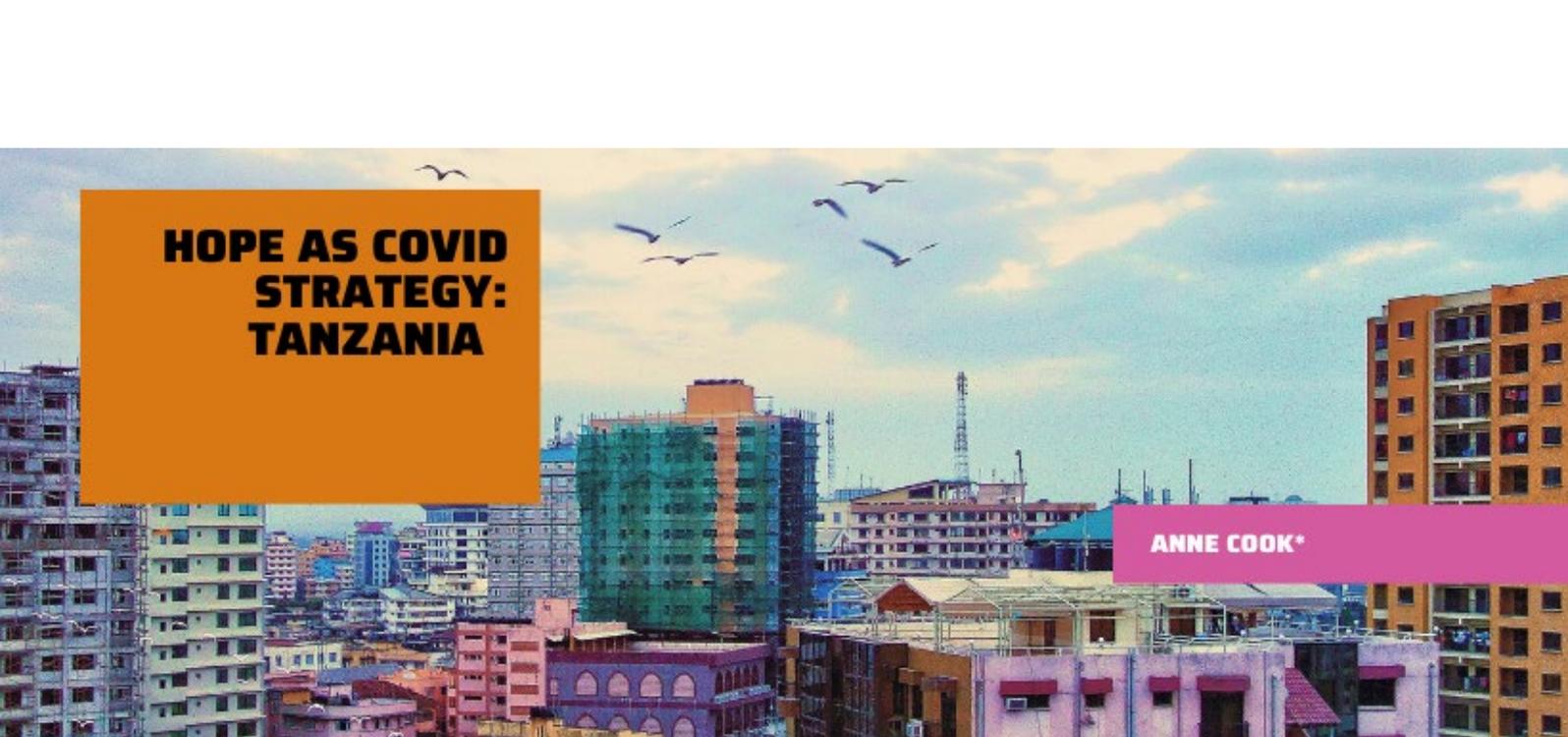
Love in the end seeks union. Ultimately, great distance can be only for a time; true love requires re-uniting. There is a going to be a wedding feast after all (Rev 19:7–9). There will be a time when God 'may be all in all' (1 Cor 15:28).



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⁷ Although the immediate reason is certainly different: for God there is no danger of infecting us or in proliferating the spread of disease or vice versa, rather the opposite. Our own
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infection and infatuation with darkness would end in our destruction if we were to come close to God, just as a virus is destroyed by antibodies.



HOPE AS COVID STRATEGY: TANZANIA

ANNE COOK*

As COVID-19 has made its presence known in East Africa, most nations have gone to some kind of lockdown. However, Tanzania has not. President John Magufuli said this is simply not possible for the Tanzanian situation, urging citizens to continue building the economy.⁸ He is a devout Catholic and also made several statements of a religious nature (It is not unusual for religious matters to be spoken about in public life in Tanzania.)

Perhaps the most controversial of his statements came just before Easter, when he encouraged the faithful to attend church services and to pray for the nation. He assured them that such large-scale gatherings would not be dangerous because the virus cannot live in the body of Christ. He went as far as to say that the virus would be burned up.

The result of widespread attendance at Easter services is unknown. While Tanzania's cases jumped from 32 pre-Easter to 480 in the weeks following,⁹ there has been no report on numbers from the government since then, almost three weeks ago. As the government emphasises the number of recoveries, I hear every few days from friends whose relatives have died of 'fever of the lungs' (*homa ya mapafu*). They are reluctant to say that it was COVID-19 -- without a test, this is a prosecutable offence for spreading misinformation, and people are not being tested.

Most recently, President Magufuli ordered a shipment of COVID-curing tea from Madagascar, and photos of the Minister for Foreign Affairs receiving and trying some of the tea were well circulated. While the WHO has continued to insist that herbal remedies are no cure

for COVID-19, President Magufuli has commissioned his own tests into the tea.¹⁰

It all has the appearance of an oppressive government burying its head in the sand, trusting God to deliver while ignoring science. Yet President Magufuli is hardly anti-science: he has a PhD in chemistry. So what's going on?

I have spent the better part of the last decade living in Tanzania, listening to primarily urban, middle-class Tanzanians teach and preach, trying to understand their theology. I've given an example here of Magufuli's response to COVID-19, but the same issues and patterns play out at other levels in Tanzania too. Social media is awash with Christians proof-texting promises of God's protection from the Bible against COVID-19. I humbly offer this explanation of the situation: what may at first appear to be anti-scientific may, in fact, be aimed at getting Tanzanians to follow precautions and resist passivity – if you understand Tanzanian theology.

A preoccupation of Tanzanian theology is how to persevere without giving up. In Swahili, it revolves around the phrase *kukata tamaa*, literally, to cut desire, more idiomatically, to lose hope. It's how Tanzanians talk about giving up, and a great deal of Tanzanian Christian theology is given over to encouraging others not to give up.

If you *kata tamaa*, that is, if you give up or lose hope, you are characterised by passivity. Having lost hope, you stop striving, become complacent. It is a state of stasis, even paralysis. This can be metaphorical as you lose your drive to succeed; or manifested quite literally,

⁸ <https://allafrica.com/stories/202004230144.html>, this article was written mid-May 2020.

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<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/tanzania/>

¹⁰ <https://www.barrons.com/news/africa-cdc-says-tanzania-virus-tests-very-reliable-01588856109>

for example, in not wanting to get out of bed; ultimately, it is understood to be the cause of suicide.

When you speak to middle-class Tanzanians about causes of the woes of their nation, they locate them in this passivity. Tanzania could be more prosperous, they insist, if people were more active in seeking solutions. They diagnose the issue as one of belief: people lose hope in what is possible, and so they do not act, and Tanzania's prospects dwindle. This conviction is applied across the board. The solution to any issue must begin with hope. A loss of hope is the start of a disaster.

This loss of hope is profoundly theological because it is ultimately a loss of faith in God. Tanzanians believe that there is a solution to every problem. Deep in their psyche is the belief that God always gives what is sufficient; this belief is present in both traditional African religion and Christianity. Though it may take years, God will always make a way if you are patient enough to wait for it. Perseverance is a key Christian discipline, but for a Tanzanian is not inherently virtuous: it has a goal. If you give up before you reach that goal, you're saying you don't believe God has or can make a way. You're saying he is not God, that you owe him no fealty.

A constant refrain of Tanzanian worship songs is *Hakuna Mungu kama wewe* – there is no God but you. It's a statement that has real currency in Tanzania's pluralistic society, where there are other viable options, be they Islam or traditional practices. If you lose hope in God, it may manifest in seeking out these alternate forms of power. For Tanzanians, a loss of hope hits at the very nature of the First Commandment: I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me. In today's globalizing world, a third option is modernistic thinking. For a Christian to lose hope might look like going to see a witchdoctor, but it can also look like relying on science for healing without acknowledging God as the Healer. And so Magufuli warned the nation, a mask cannot save you, only God can do that. And yet, this is not to eschew science completely. Magufuli wears a mask and was an early adopter of the 'Wuhan shake' foot tap instead of a handshake, photographed performing it before the first recorded case of COVID-19 in Tanzania.¹¹

As information about COVID-19 started to be shared in our social networks, a fierce debate emerged between Christians about whether Christians should share that information. It was a complex and multi-faceted debate, but one concern was that if people continually heard about the dangers of COVID-19, and this was not balanced by reminders of God's power, then people

would lose hope. The issue was not the efficacy of science; there was general agreement that information about the necessary precautions should be circulated. Rather, the issue at stake was that these not take over or drown out confidence in God. As information about precautions was circulated, the faithful would also share and re-share videos and Bible verses promising God's protection for His people.

Indeed, the Bible's wisdom gives the foundation for health. When I asked on social media about the effects of *kukata tamaa* on the body, two pastors immediately messaged back with Proverbs 17:22, "a cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Another expounded on this: those who have lost hope are not physically active. They lose immunity or put on weight, becoming more susceptible to problems like high blood pressure and diabetes. Hope is protective of health and bodily wellbeing. In the light of a health crisis, hope is even more important, and those who heed the Bible's words will cling to it.

In the West, we tend to think that if you are transparent and provide people with information, they will be able to make an informed decision. The logic in Tanzania is different. It runs something more like this: people need the right information, the kind that will equip them to take action. This information cannot be discouraging or overwhelming: that leads to loss of hope, which leads to passivity. Instead, it needs to be the kind of information which motivates people to action. This kind of thinking is not entirely foreign to westerners: Christian climate change activists Claire Dawson and Dr Mick Pope provide stories in *A Climate of Hope* to encourage other Christians that they are not alone, for example.¹² Paul Bodenham's chapter in *Time to Act*, a resource book for Christians in Extinction Rebellion, examines the relationship between hope and grief, that it is as realities are faced, and feelings acknowledged that space is created to be given over to solutions.¹³ However, unlike in the climate sector where accuracy of information is imperative, in Tanzania, hope is generative of scientific compliance. Bad news, even if it is accurate, is assumed to result in discouragement, a sense that there's nothing to be done, so there's no point in taking precautions. Hope is created by good news. It is people who have hope who will take precautions against COVID-19, such as handwashing, mask-wearing, and social distancing.

President Magufuli claimed he sent samples of pawpaw and goat to the national testing facility and got positive results from those, so the results of tests were not to be trusted. Critics asked, why would he undermine people's faith in medical science and facilities?

¹¹ <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/05/the-coronavirus-is-seeing-the-footshake-replace-the-handshake.html>

¹² Dawson, Claire & Pope, Mick, 2014. *A climate of hope: church and mission in a warming world*, UNOH Publishing: Dandenong, Victoria.

¹³ Bodenham, Paul. "Beyond Hope and Despair: Journeying Together through Climate Grief." In *Time to Act*, edited by Jeremy Williams. London: SPCK, 2020.

However, if my assessment is correct, it's possible that this move was aimed less at accuracy and more at hope. If the story is that things are not as bad as they appear, the virus is not as widespread as it might seem from the tests, then there is no need to be alarmed or to lose hope. Instead, you can calmly comply with the recommended precautions.

The same is true of urging people to go to church even though it is likely to increase the spread of the disease. In Tanzania, prayer is almost always a community activity; people draw near to God as they physically draw near to each other. The idea of praying individually or at home is confusing and being unable to pray together sounds a lot like not praying at all. If people cannot cry out to God, how are they to maintain their hope? When presented with the option of a hopeful, praying community and people losing hope and becoming passive, only one offers the possibility of continuing to combat the disease.

In this climate, it becomes understandable to limit information about the number of people in the country who are infected. It is even wise to pursue every solution that presents itself, however unlikely it is to work – like a tea from Madagascar. The point is to offer hope, to communicate that all is not lost. It's less about finding a real solution and more about helping people to keep going until a viable solution can be found.

Hope and its relationship to action and perseverance are not the only relevant factors in understanding the Tanzanian response to COVID-19. It does not account for President Magufuli casting suspicion on masks and equipment that come from outside the country, for example. Meanwhile, economics was the main reason given for the lack of lockdown. However, understanding the theological significance of hope provides a lens through which to read the response to COVID-19 in Tanzania, one which does not cast it as ignorant or foolish, but strategic. Whether that strategy will be sufficient remains to be seen, but for Tanzanians, it is certainly strategic to call one another to hope, and hope in God: it is those who do who are empowered for the fight against COVID-19.

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CONFERRALS

January 2020 – May 2020

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Derek Brotherson

SMBC

Contextualization or Syncretism? The Use of Other-Faith Worship Forms in the Bible and in Insider Movements

Andrew Matthews

CC

The Worth of Work in a World of Vanity: The Evaluation of Human Vocation in Ecclesiastes

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Missional Marriage in Australia - the application of missional ethics to a Biblical ethic of marriage

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Matthew's Mission to "all nations" in its relation with the Torah



SPIRITUAL FORMATION ONLINE

DIANE HOCKRIDGE

When we think about fostering student formation in online learning contexts we often find it difficult to know where to start. This may be partly because we are less familiar with online learning contexts. It may also be because formation is a complex multi-faceted goal and we have not teased out which aspects of formation we want to address and how these might be tackled. The term 'spiritual formation' is commonly used as an umbrella term to describe our goal of fostering long term holistic change and growth in students and often overlaps with other terms like ministry, leadership, pastoral or theological formation. Addressing a complex goal like student formation requires a multi-faceted, holistic approach. I offer here a few insights about the nature of online learning and propose a framework within which we can approach the task of fostering formation of students in online learning contexts.

A number of theological educators and researchers emphasise that when it comes to online learning contexts it's important to consider the whole environment and the supportive structures that will help student learning and formation. Stephen and Mary Lowe, for example, propose an 'ecological' approach to understanding the ways in which students are formed which takes into account the wider context of the larger macrosystem of the student.¹⁴

A framework from the field of Learning Design takes into account this larger macrosystem and can be applied to structure and orient how we address student formation in online settings. The Activity Centred Analysis and Design (ACAD) framework employs three key constructs: *task structures*, which relate to the design of learning tasks; *structures of place* which includes a variety of physical and digital settings in

which student activity unfolds; and *social structures* which considers the influence of social interactions and connections.¹⁵

Employing the shorthand of 'pedagogies', 'people' and 'places' the sections below give a few examples of how we can use these constructs in online course design. These examples describe design elements reported by students to impact on their formation in online learning contexts.

Pedagogies (Task Design)

A good place to start when planning online learning is to think about what we actually want students to *do*, what tasks can we ask them to engage in that will help them achieve the learning outcomes? Or in terms of formation, what tasks will enable the formational goals we are seeking? Here are two tasks that may contribute to student formation.

1. Differing Perspectives

Providing students with opportunities to engage with and respond to differing perspectives can be helpful in developing the *dispositional* aspects of formation. Engaging productively with the differing perspectives of others not only helps students better articulate their learning and ideas, it can also lead to perspective, attitudinal and even behaviour changes such as learning self-awareness, tolerance, patience and humility. Learning how to negotiate interactions in which scholars, teachers and peers may differ about questions of biblical interpretation, church tradition, or beliefs can be a significant formational experience as students are challenged to examine their own assumptions and to learn from the insights of others. Including such 'disorienting dilemmas' to enable

¹⁴ Lowe, Stephen D, and Mary E. Lowe. *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018; Lowe, Stephen D., and Mary E. Lowe. "Spiritual Formation in

Theological Distance Education: An Ecosystems Model." *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (2010): 85-102.

¹⁵ Carvalho, Lucila, and Peter Goodyear. *The Architecture of Productive Learning Networks*. Routledge, 2014.

perspective change is consistent with transformative learning theory.¹⁶

In online courses we can include opportunities for students to engage with and respond to differing perspectives *in course materials*. The content or readings might intentionally include a range of perspectives, or we might include videos or podcasts of panels or interview interactions between scholars. We can ask students to engage with a range of perspectives through setting *learning tasks* such as online forum questions that require or invite exploration of different perspectives, collaborative tasks, debates or role plays; or tasks and assessments that include opportunities to *reflect on learning from, exposure to, and engagement with differing perspectives*, such as via reflective journals or exercises, or online forum discussions.

2. Engaging in Spiritual Practices

Engagement in spiritual practices may seem an obvious means of spiritual formation but it is possible for theological students to learn about Christian spirituality without actually furthering their own Christian spirituality. Engaging in spiritual practices may not be something that we usually focus on in online courses but it is certainly possible to include the expectation for students to *engage in real practices* in online courses. This actual engagement in practices is important because, as J.K.A. Smith points out, practices actually train peoples' hearts through their bodies: 'every liturgy constitutes a pedagogy that teaches us in all sorts of precognitive ways, to be a certain kind of person'.¹⁷

Students enrolled in our online Guided Spiritual Formation unit report that engaging in spiritual practices enables deeper self-awareness, a growing awareness of being known by God and develops a deeper sense of identity. In addition, *regular participation in spiritual practices over an extended period of time* contributes to the development of productive habits and dispositions. *Engaging in unfamiliar spiritual practices* and then reflecting on these experiences was reported as valuable in raising awareness of other spiritual practices and how these might be used to encourage others. *The expectation that students engage in spiritual practices with other people in their own context* enabled closer connections with students' home worshiping community and increased appreciation for other Christians.

People (Social Structures)

The second key design construct relates to people and communication and this is where many of us struggle. The ACAD framework construct of 'social structures' is helpful in identifying how we might *shape the social context of student activity* to best support the formation of students in online learning contexts. Helpful questions to ask are: What kind of social structures does this activity need? What kind of social environment do we want to foster? How will communication be facilitated? Who are the people involved? Some examples of formational social structures in online learning contexts are:

1. Interactions with Peers

Interactions with peers (other students) seem to be particularly helpful for students as they explore the unique content and challenges of theological study. Interacting with peers can have a formational impact by furthering deeper understanding of both self and others and by enabling development of personal dispositions such as humility, patience, respect for others, and learning to interact with others in constructive ways. This suggests that we should be looking for ways to enable meaningful and extended peer interactions in our online learning contexts.



In online contexts peer interactions can be facilitated via online discussion forums or via live web-based sessions. It is helpful for peer-peer interactions to be focused on reflecting together on how the challenges of theological learning might be worked through and applied in students' life, work and ministry contexts. *Structured peer review tasks* can be included such as peer review of ministry skills like preaching, or group reflective practice reviews. Ensuring *consistent groups for interaction* provides extended opportunities for students to engage with the same group of peers which

¹⁶ Mezirow, J. Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

¹⁷ Smith, James K A. Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009, 25.

can result in more in-depth interactions and closer relational connections.

2. Interactions with Teachers

Just as in face-to-face learning contexts the prioritising of formational goals, demonstration of care for students and modelling of integrated Christian living by educators can encourage online students in their own formational journeys. Online students report the positive impact of teachers emphasising not only cognitive understanding but the importance of Christian growth, sharing personal stories, being open about their own struggles, praying for students and encouraging students to apply their learning in their lives. These kinds of actions can be incorporated even where teaching elements are pre-recorded or asynchronous. For example, when pre-recording video content teachers can be intentionally 'real', sharing personal stories

and encouraging personal application.

Paying attention to established best practices for online teaching which relate to teacher availability, presence, management of online



communication, ensuring prompt feedback and so on, also provides a strong base for student engagement without which students are less likely to have a positive formational experience.

Places (Structures of Place)

The third design construct relates to the broader learning environment or the *spaces and places* in which learning (and formation) takes place. For online learning it's important to remember that these spaces and places will be both *virtual spaces* and *physical spaces* since, even though studying online, students are actually always physically located in real contexts. Helpful questions to ask as we consider the spaces and places of online learning are: What kind of place does

this activity need? What tools, equipment & resources need to be available?

1. Virtual Spaces:

Every learning context has a set of constraints and affordances (or 'action potentials').¹⁸ We may not often think about the constraints of classroom teaching yet we are actually constrained by many things: arrangement of furniture, technologies available, lighting, noise-level, and so on. Equally we are enabled to teach (and students are enabled to learn) by the provision of such things as desks, lecterns, whiteboards and projectors. In online learning contexts we are similarly enabled and constrained.

Two key factors to consider for online learning contexts are:

A. Extent of synchronicity. In online contexts we often have a choice of whether to use synchronous or asynchronous forms of engagement, or a mix of both. Synchronous activity is where students and teachers communicate virtually in real time such as via Zoom. Asynchronous or non-live activity is where communication happens over an extended period of time via means such as online forums, text chat or email.

The choices educators make around synchronicity will impact substantially on the learning and teaching experience and it's helpful to be aware of the pros and cons of each form of engagement. For example, asynchronous communication may be frustrating for some students and teachers due to its slowness and lack of visual cues, yet it can be good for drawing out thoughtful responses and ensuring all students have opportunities to contribute.

B. Extent of task-oriented activity. Research by Abedin, Daneshgar & D'Ambra highlights the significance of 'non-task sociability' in online learning contexts in contributing to participation and engagement and reducing isolation or boredom.¹⁹ My research has similarly indicated that some non-task-oriented interaction with peers and teachers can be helpful for

¹⁸ Bower, Matt. *Design of Technology-Enhanced Learning: Integrating Research and Practice*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2017.

¹⁹ Abedin, Babak, Farhad Daneshgar, and John D'Ambra. "Pattern of Non-Task Interactions in Asynchronous

Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning Courses." *Interactive Learning Environments* 22, no. 1 (2014): 18-34.

formation. Creating opportunities and spaces for such non-task-oriented social interactions can be challenging in online learning contexts. However, the concept of non-task-oriented interaction helps us to consider how to enable these sorts of encounters given the constraints of the online context. We might include virtual spaces where people can communicate freely like open online forums or synchronous gatherings; or encourage students to form virtual prayer, reading or study groups; or include open-ended tasks or questions that enable student choice and



exploration, which in turn open up opportunities for what we might call ‘serendipitous’ formational encounters, conversations or insights.

2. Physical Spaces

We can also consider how the external contexts in which students live, work and serve might be employed to help form students. Here the concept of authentic learning and assessment (i.e. tasks that engage students in real-life contexts) can be helpful. For example, students can develop and practise ministry skills in authentic external contexts through supervised workplace and ministry placements, or less intensively through learning and assessment tasks that occur in external contexts such as interviewing people for an assignment, asking people for feedback on a sermon, or researching a project. We can even push spiritual practices out into students’ real life contexts. Such authentic tasks, particularly when combined with reflective practice, can enable significant formational learning.

Conclusion

There is of course much more that could be said. I have given a few examples of how we might use the three constructs of ‘pedagogies’, ‘people’ and ‘places’ to guide us in developing online courses that take into account our goal of holistic formation of students.

As we do so, a helpful posture is to try to *imagine other people’s learning*.²⁰ As educators our primary purpose is not to *teach* but to foster *learning* (and formation) in our students. To do so we need to imagine other people’s learning, carefully considering which pedagogies, people and places will support the kind of learning and formation we wish to enable.

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education.

²⁰ Goodyear, Peter, and Symeon Retalis. *Technology-Enhanced Learning: Design Patterns and Pattern Languages*. 2010.

Wise Wastefulness in a COVID World

SAM WAN



“Throw your bread upon the water... give property to seven and eight for you know not what disaster may happen on earth,” instructs the wise teacher (Eccl 11:1-2).²¹ This wise instruction seems the antithesis to our reactions when disaster struck in the shape of the COVID pandemic. Qohelet tells his readers to be un-protective with their capital in uncertainty, as opposed to our instinct of being economically protective. Some have linked this to an ancient Egyptian proverb, “do a good deed and throw it in the water; when it dries you will find it.”²² Yet, it’s not as strange as it sounds; because you will find this careless action toward an ambiguous recipient in another sage’s words “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Jesus, Matt 6:3). Life and virtue, for both teachers, is not about selfish gain but selfless loss. If Ecclesiastes makes the reader wise through the process of wrestling through its wisdom,²³ then to wrestle with this wisdom is to (re)discover the deep and wise divine economy and reenact how we manage ourselves and our communities.²⁴ In doing so, we shall become all the more wiser in conforming to the wise sage Christ and practice the calling to the “wastefulness of grace”²⁵ in this COVID and post/COVID period.

²¹ Reworked from a presentation at L’Arche 40th anniversary conference 2019.

²² Mark Fox, *Qoheleth and His Contradictions* (United Kingdom: Sheffield Academic Press 1989). 274

²³ I take the conclusion that the teacher (or frame narrator) makes that “[t]he words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd” (Eccl 12:11) as indicative of the hermeneutic of the book; it is pedagogical in making one wise. The proverbs are “set in order,” and what he wrote is “upright and true.” (Eccl 12:10)

A Tale of Two Kingdom Economies

In the 21st century there are two economies at play for the people of God: the economy of wise wastefulness and the economy of the shallow “consumer kingdom.”²⁶ The consumer kingdom paints on the mural of western societies three intertwined narratives: the first narrative says that inherent in humanity is a desire for more; the second tells how individualism gives us the freedom to choose whatever we desire; finally, the myth of scarcity states that there is not enough of what we desire. The outcomes of these narratives are competition, a leaning towards efficiency and productivity for gain, and a drive for the growth of capital. Over the last months, these have reared their ugly side when the individual autonomy was pitted against state sanctioned lockdown where armed protestors stormed Michigan state capitol.²⁷ Panic and hoard buying showed the selfishness of self-

²⁴ Economy comes from οἶκος "household" and νέμομαι "to manage"

²⁵ A phrase used by William P. Young, *The Shack : Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007).

²⁶ Peter Block, *An Other Kingdom : Departing the Consumer Culture*, ed. Walter Brueggemann and John McKnight (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016). XVII.

²⁷ Washington Post, "'Let Us In': Anti-Lockdown Protesters Storm Michigan State Capitol " (2020).



preservation.²⁸ The shallowness of relationships that were once focused on productivity and gain have been revealed, and no amount of online media can replace the necessity of the emotional and social needs of deep face to face interactions that develop healthy relationships.²⁹

What COVID has uncovered, is an everyday economy that sees the management of our material, time and relational capital in a way that is shallow and detrimental to our mental, relational and spiritual health.³⁰ Perhaps the antidote in a COVID and post-COVID world is a (re)discovery of the “wastefulness of grace” that is found in the Divine economy.

A Theology of Wastefulness

We do not need to look far for us to discover the divine economy of wastefulness; creation, redemption and Sabbath can be seen as an overflow of the wasteful love of God. When we gaze out into nature, we can see the divine characteristic of wastefulness imprinted in design (Rom 1:20). “How many different trees are there?” Stuart Coulton³¹ would ask in first year pastoral theology, “God could have made one tree with one leaf, one flower, and one colour and cloned it a hundred thousand times over. But he didn’t. It would seem that

²⁸ Whether lockdown is truly necessary or has indeed led to the flattening of the curve is not in my purview, only that in the place of the restriction of individual freedom seemingly for the whole, hyper-individualism rears in defiance. See Paul Verhaeghe, *What About Me? : The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society*, trans. J. A. Hedley-Prole (Melbourne: Scribe. 2016). 219. ["Toilet Paper Shortage from Coronavirus Panic Buying Sees Argument Break out at Woolworths in Sydney,"](#) ABC News. Accessed 10th of May 2020. . ["Scott Morrison Says Panic Buying Driven by Coronavirus Lockdown Fears Is 'Ridiculous' and 'Un-Australian',"](#) ABC News. Accessed 10th of May 2020.

²⁹ See Kate Murphy, ["Why Zoom Is Terrible,"](#) New York Times. Accessed 10th of May 2020. Lydia Denworth, ["What Nature Can Teach Us About Friendship in the Time of Coronavirus,"](#) Science Focus Magazine. Accessed 10th of May 2020. Silvana Greco, Mary Holmes, and Jordan McKenzie, "Friendship and Happiness from a Sociological Perspective," in *Friendship and Happiness: Across the Life-Span and Cultures*, ed. Melikşah Demir (Dordrecht: Springer

God is needlessly extravagant.” We could describe this extravagance as wise wastefulness (c.f. Psalm 104:24-25), a wastefulness that is described by Brueggemann as a “liturgy of abundance ... an orgy of fruitfulness, everything in its kind is to multiply the overflowing goodness that pours from God’s spirit.”³² If we tease out wastefulness as a divine outpouring of His love, just as Jonathan Edwards famously put, “It is no argument of the emptiness or deficiency of a fountain, that it is inclined to overflow;”³³ perhaps we could categorise wastefulness (or overflowing abundance) as part of the economy of the Trinity. In the perichoretic life of the Trinity, each Person is at all times loving the *Other*: the Father, Son and Spirit abundantly, extravagantly and wastefully dance with the *Other* in an unending self-giving love. An application of Rahner’s rule applies here: *the economy of the economic Trinity ought to be the economy of the immanent Trinity.*

Humanity made in the *imago Dei* is imprinted in wastefulness, especially in the rhythm of the Sabbath and the desire for rest and play. In the first Sabbath, God welcomes his people into his wastefulness, pastime and play; to ‘waste’ time strolling together in the garden (Gen 3:8). Christ becomes wastefulness personified; the wisely wasteful Father begets a wisely wasteful Son. From Jesus’ parables of the Lost sheep and Prodigal God in Luke 15,³⁴ to his miracles of feeding the thousands (Matt 14:13-21), and the commendation



(Netherlands, 2015). Aubrey Hirsch, ["Friendships Are Crucial to Survive the Isolation of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Why Do They Feel So Hard?,"](#) Vox. Accessed 10th of May 2020.

³⁰ See Verhaeghe and Hedley-Prole. And See, Carol Johnston, "A Christian Critique of Economics," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 22 (2002).

³¹ From the author’s recollection, in 2014. Stuart Coulton is a former SMBC Principal.

³² Walter Brueggemann, "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity," *The Christian Century*, March 24 1999.

³³ Jonathan Edwards, ["A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World,"](#) Monergism. Accessed 11th of May 2020.

³⁴ Timothy J. Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008). 24. There is a theme of wasteful hospitality all throughout the gospel of Luke, see Joshua W. Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017).

of the prostitute who wastes the expensive perfume (Lk 7:36-50), the son of God is abundantly wise and wasteful. The Divine economy of wastefulness is all the more revealed in his *Modus Operandi*: in incarnation, Christ takes upon himself the uneconomical limits of becoming a created being. At the cross Christ gives his life and body in wasteful generosity to his people. At resurrection, the offer of new transformed lives is wasted on people who never earned nor deserved it. And for people who have received wastefulness, the economy of the Godhead overflows into the economy of his Kingdom, wastefulness becomes one of management styles for God's people redeemed into God's household.

Wasteful in our Capital

The spell of scarcity, fulfilment and hyper-individuality is broken when we realise there is *enough*. Our daily bread and spiritual gifts are given freely by our heavenly Father when needed (Matt 6:11, 26-34; 1 Cor 12; 2 Cor 6:10).³⁵ In the Western world, many of us *must* realise that perhaps our 'enough' is actually more than we *need*. When we accept that our abundance is given freely, our posture of being meritocratic earners is changed first to thankful receivers and then to wise and wasteful givers, for "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). In a period of self-preserving mentality, the counter-cultural task is to give and expect nothing in return, to "throw your bread upon the water... give property to seven and eight for you know not what disaster may happen on earth" (Eccl 11:1-2). Indeed, capturing this voice is the true wise Sage, Jesus,³⁶ who teaches that hospitality is shown not to those who can return hospitality in a patron and client society of prestige and honour, but those who cannot give anything back (Lk 14:12-14).³⁷ Of course, being wasteful is not being unwise, Jesus warns us to be shrewd in our dealings (Matt 10:16); and this wisdom is found in being wise in how we are wasteful.

Wasteful in our Relationship

In a world of fast-paced relationships where the seconds are measured and time is money, a recovering of deep presence in deep time with others is an antidote to the loneliness of our COVID period. Rachele

Gilmour writes, "[t]o find Sabbath rest, especially for those of us who have already ceased normal activities [in this COVID period], may be to give others rest."³⁸ In order to develop healthy deep relationships, we need to waste time not just being present but giving our presence.³⁹ Jesus frequently withdrew to practice deep time with his Father in prayer (Lk 5:16). In Jesus' time with his followers was not just a teacher-student dynamic, but spent in deep relational time. We often recall when Jesus calls Levi the tax collector to follow him, but we may forget that Jesus *follows* Levi and dines with tax collectors and sinners. He not only practices reversal-hospitality but demonstrates that discipleship was not only catechizing but a time-*wasting* dinner engagement (Mk 2:13-17). Jesus had the courage to waste time with God's children, embodying what Pope Francis said, "[I] regularly asked fathers if ... they had the courage to have the love to waste time with their children.... The majority would say: 'But, I can't because I have so much work to do...' And the father was absent from that child that was growing up and didn't play with him, he didn't waste time with him."⁴⁰

If we viewed ministry from a consumerist mentality, then deep relational time is seemingly *wasteful*. This is exactly why Eugene Peterson call his brothers and sisters to be: "unbusy," rather than allowing self-image and others' expectations to dictate the role of a pastor.⁴¹ Of course, the pastor is busy! But we ought not be busy in consumeristic ways, instead being busy in wise wastefulness: the ministry of prayer, hospitality and presence. Reimer describes this in a scene in a L'Arche community where people with intellectual disabilities dwell with people who are neurotypical. Dinner preparation is underway and Moses is making dinner with his friend but takes half an hour to cut a single onion and three hours to make a pot of stew. Yet peppered around dinner is a joyful conversation. Reimer reflects: "Meal preparation in this kitchen is entirely about the journey. Edible outcomes are something of a bonus."⁴²

Ultimately, the practice of deep time is the practical theology of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God; for God's economy works on a different clock. Busyness says, "I will do it." Ministry says, "God will do it;" so to serve is to wait and engage in, what Peterson calls, the "Ministry of small talk." Peterson warns pastors not to

³⁵ For discussion of the functionality of spiritual gifts in time of need, see Brian Brock, *Wondrously Wounded: Theology, Disability, and the Body of Christ* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press 2019).

³⁶ Credit ought to be given here to Kirk Patston who pointed me towards a wisdom Christology.

³⁷ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1997). 550.

³⁸ Rachele Gilmour, "[Meditation 14: Rest Amidst the Unrest](#)," Trinity Theological College. Accessed 12th of May, 2020.

³⁹ E.g. just being present is eating dinner but on being on a phone as opposed to giving presence is giving our attention and our whole being to someone.

⁴⁰ Junno Arocho Esteves, "[Pope: Fathers Must Have the Courage to 'Waste Time' with Their Children](#)," Zenit. Accessed 12th of May, 2020.

⁴¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*, Leadership Library (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1989). 18.

⁴² Kevin S. Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability* (United Kingdom: Continuum, 2009). 20.

seize every opportunity to manipulate the conversation to Jesus because small talk is where everyday people live.⁴³ If one believes in the sovereignty of the God, one believes that he works in the ordinary everyday things. A sitcom character said: "Time is a concept known to only one of God's creatures: man. Just for today, be a sunflower."⁴⁴ The sunflower doesn't control the sun, it sits in the allotted path of God (Eccl 3:1). God's watch does not tick in seconds or minutes and so part of stepping into deep relationships is to fall in step with God's time. This is an evangelistic affair as Hauerwas writes: "The church as God's gesture in and for the world must be the people who manifest our conviction that we do not live on the world's time, but in God's time."⁴⁵ The economy of God does not deal in secular efficiency, but wasteful presence and friendship; if we expect those with whom we walk to go a certain speed, then we may very well be manipulating their time and neglect God's time. Mary Oliver wrote: "Things take the time they take. Don't worry. How many roads did St. Augustine follow before he became St. Augustine?"⁴⁶

The more we practice wasteful presence and time, the more it transforms Christian siblinghood into friendship. The people of God are made family by the blood of Christ. Family is not chosen, but friendship is a free gift. Hansen, a pastor theologian, compares the gift of friendship to wildflowers: "Just as wildflowers are superfluous splashes of color strewn by God liberally over a mountain, our friendship is based on the reality of God's unfettered, outrageous desire to bless... God's grace works its way out in pastoral friendships; spontaneous, liberal, unnecessary."⁴⁷ Hansen draws out this practical theology of the economy of divine wastefulness, that the wastefulness of creation is the wastefulness of redemption, and the wastefulness of redemption becomes the economy that the people of God are to conduct ourselves. For just as wildflowers are beautiful because they are superfluous, so too are we beautiful when we are graciously free, other-person-centered and wasteful in our living.

Sam Wan is an SMBC graduate and researches practical theology, disability theology, Jewish studies, Old Testament and sexuality.



⁴³ Peterson. 115.

⁴⁴ Joe Keenan, *You Scratch My Book...*, *Frasier* (1995), Television Series.

⁴⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, "The Gesture of a Truthful Story," in *Critical Reflections on Stanley Hauerwas' Theology of Disability: Disabling Society, Enabling Theology*, ed. John

Swinton (Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2004). 80.

⁴⁶ Mary Oliver, *Felicity* (London, England: Corsair, 2017).

⁴⁷ David Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry without All the Answers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2012). 135.

BREAKING RECORDS

ACT Monograph Series



In 2019, the ACT Monograph Series published five books in total – a record for one year! The series started in 2014. When I joined the ACT in 2016, two books had been published. There are now 20 books in the Series, which has been in existence for 5 ½ years.

So far in 2020, three books have been published, and it looks likely that 2020 will see the record either equalled or broken. In 2020 so far:

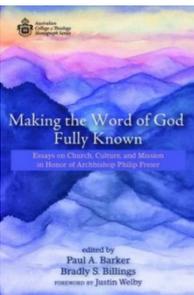
1. *The Son of Man in Mark's Gospel: Exploring its Possible Connections with the Book of Ezekiel* by David Forrest Mitchell

Endorsements from Australian academics:

"Is there anything left to say on the subject of the Son of Man that hasn't been said already--and is worth saying? This valuable study by David Mitchell shows that there is! --Allan Chapple, Senior Lecturer in New Testament, Trinity Theological College

"Mitchell's volume cuts through the complexity surrounding 'the Son of Man.' It offers a rich understanding of Jesus's role within Mark and develops the biblical-theological significance of 'Son of Man' language. This book is short, carefully argued, full of good exegesis, and will be on the reading list for my Christology course." --Philip H. Kern, Head of New Testament, Moore Theological College

2. *Making the Word of God Fully Known: Essays on Church, Culture, and Mission in Honor of Archbishop Philip Freier* edited by Paul A. Barker & Bradly S. Billings



From the foreword by Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby: "This fine collection of essays, dedicated in his honour, is reflective of Archbishop Philip's prayerful and deliberate leadership of the Diocese of Melbourne in its mission to "make the Word of God fully known".

Another endorsement:

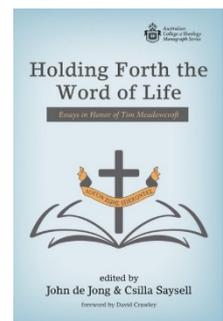
"An enjoyable and engaging read, this volume is a fitting tribute to a person who has dedicated his life to 'making the Word of God fully known'—as a teacher, academic, deacon, priest, bishop, archbishop, and primate. Reflective of Philip Freier's own broad interests and concerns, this diverse collection of essays speaks to the variety of expressions of the Anglican faith in Australia, and as such, has a great deal to offer readers in this province and around the communion." —Robert Derrenbacker, Dean, Frank Woods Associate Professor in New Testament, Trinity College Theological School

3. *Holding Forth the Word of Life: Essays in Honor of Tim Meadowcroft*, edited by John de Jong & Csilla Saysell

A couple of international endorsements:

"Turning these pages, we recognize immediately, and pervasively, the conviction that serious engagement with biblical texts invites and involves theological and social and political engagement as well. This is a fitting celebration of Tim Meadowcroft's career as a biblical scholar and theologian of the church and its witness in the world."—Joel B. Green, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Fuller Theological Seminary

"Holding Forth the Word of Life beautifully celebrates the life and scholarly contribution of Tim Meadowcroft as he retires from full-time teaching. These thought-provoking and thoughtful essays are a testimony to Tim's influence on his contemporaries and his students. But beyond honouring a scholar who deserves such praise, these essays are worthy in and of themselves for their own contribution to scholarship"—Tremper Longman III, Distinguished Scholar and Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, Westmont College.



To talk about publishing in the ACT Monograph Series, please contact Acquisitions Editor [Megan Powell du Toit](mailto:Megan.Powell@duoit.com).



MAJORITY WORLD FACULTY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Stuart Brooking



I have had nights of little sleep in the past month or two, thinking about my friends. I do not mean my friends in Australia, but my friends in the lower income countries around the world. Because of my work with Overseas Council Australia I have hundreds of friends in leadership in theological institutions around the world. I am worried for them, and their students, and their communities.

In Australia and New Zealand, we are understandably pleased with being in countries that have ‘flattened the curve’, and being in countries that have so much wealth we can find our way through the economic shock of the lock down. That is not the situation in the countries with the majority of Bible colleges.

My colleagues and I are in touch with over 1,000 Bible colleges, and all those with campus-based teaching (99% of them) had to shut down their teaching within two weeks or less. In a small number of cases, such as in Indonesia, they could keep students on campus, but the students had to be socially isolated, with no classroom activities.

In a time like this, it is good for the fellowship that exists amongst the Australasian theological community to be expanded to faculty members globally, many of which are in colleges we may not even know. Who better than us could understand the affection they will have for their students; the challenges they’ll face in modelling the faith, and; the struggle to learn new skills in online education with little preparation? With this sense of fellowship, we can pray for them in the coming months, and know the privilege of that Christian partnership.

As I have been envisaging the future, I have found it helpful to realise there are three transitions that most Bible colleges will face in the coming 24 months.

Transition 1: Instant online teaching

In some countries there were just a few days’ notice of the lock down. India had 4 hours.

In most cases students had to be sent home. Many have returned to places not conducive to study, with poor

access to IT, with too many people in the house, and with duties at home to make a living. All this means that they cannot access their studies in real time, if at all.

In some cases, they couldn’t get away from the campus. These students have had to face an uncertain time frame of isolation and can’t be with their families. Their personal finances dry up quickly in this situation.

In most cases the faculty members have been required to keep classes running as best they can, which means they must ‘go online’. On top of their own lack of knowledge and preparation for online teaching, there is a student body, only half of whom may be available. They may have sporadic attendance and a constant anxiety for their studies and even their lives.

The impact of the global stock markets plummeting in March this year moved quickly into the the income streams for these colleges. Many international donors have much reduced income, which has meant almost instant reductions. Most Bible college income streams have dried up very quickly. Student fees are typically 5%- 50% of the college budget, but if students don’t attend they don’t pay. So called ‘third stream’ incomes, such as renting premises for conferences, have also ended abruptly.

The impact of all this on faculty members creates a background anxiety for their lives. When their college must reduce faculty pay or lay off faculty, it becomes a foreground anxiety. I expect perhaps 10-30% of colleges will not be able to operate at all throughout 2020. For those, returning in 2021 will be a struggle, since faculty may leave for other work, or there won’t be income levels to quickly reemploy faculty who were stood down.

For the faculty who remain employed they have had to move within days to ‘online teaching’ in whatever way they can. Typically, this has been using Zoom or WhatsApp. A few have used Moodle’s Big Blue Button, or Microsoft Teams. There is of course a very big difference between ‘online teaching’ and ‘online education’. In listening to dozens of groups of lecturers in the last two months there is an awareness that their current offering is often ‘clunky’ and inadequate. They are scrambling to learn how to improve their online

offerings within the constraints of the IT and the experience they have. Most are anxious about the exam periods coming up in the Northern summer period – how do you do exams online with no experience or guidance?

Of course, it is not all bad. One principal welcomed lockdown as a chance to take his recent learning about online education and introduce it into the college. Instead of the usual two-plus years to explore and plan, they were up and going in two weeks. Of course, like most other places it was ‘clunky and inadequate’, but they were underway.

Transition 2: Instant unemployment and death

It has become immediately noticeable that unemployed day labourers generally have just a few days of resources before they are in desperate need. Within a week of the lockdowns, some of our partner colleges mobilised their college community, such as it remained, to provide emergency packages for people round them. We have seen this concept of practical theological education repeatedly in times of natural disaster. Bible colleges have mobilised to help their neighbours in the wake of a tsunami, typhoon or earthquake. From one angle, their contribution might be a ‘drop in the bucket’, but sometimes it is transformative for spiritual insights for both the recipients and students. The 2004 tsunami saw Indonesian students going to regions of fundamentalist Muslims and showing love. Their testimonies were profound as the gospel of love they lived out to these previously hostile people, changed them. It is possible that new missional opportunities and new spiritual growth in Christian leaders may flow from such practical care.

Things are moving quickly with the pandemic. I’m writing this in May. I expect by the end of June we’ll be seeing very large numbers of infections and deaths in the slum areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The average age of people in those places, compared to the West, will be an advantage. They are much younger in most lower income countries. The unknowable element is the comorbidity impact of things such as HIV, malaria, and TB, which are seen in far higher rates than in the West.

As the virus itself takes hold, the colleges will show practical care, not just for those without work, but those who suffer the impact of death, family disruption, and consequent loss of income. On top of these personal and family impacts there will be issues of injustice which will be encountered. These may include evictions, discrimination, and societal rejection. A few colleges already work with their students in contexts of such injustice and so they will have skills to bring to bear for this new situation. In areas where a minority

group is in power, we ought to expect civil unrest by the disaffected majority. If this is at a national level, then regime change may even result.

Another aspect for the faculty members to consider is their own demographic disadvantage. While the general population in many lower income countries is young, the faculty members are not. In such cases, the theory we discuss of ‘leading from a position of vulnerability’ doesn’t usually imagine actual infection and death as the topic of that vulnerability. Pray for wisdom and courage for the ‘older-than-the-average’ faculty members.

Transition 3: Gradual Building of Online Education

One of the promising possibilities is that through 2020 and into 2021 many colleges will develop new skills in online education. They will learn how to do asynchronous classes, blog discussions, breakout groups, hybrid deliveries, incorporate videos into lectures, assess students in modes appropriate to the medium, and administer the whole program online.

The colleges that survive the first two transitions, I expect, will quickly return to campus-based education. In many cases they have a theological commitment to that way of formation, and they have a pragmatic desire to use the resource of the campus.

But they will have developed institutional skills in online education. Few will squander those new resources. Most will now have a capacity to double or triple their student body. I know a number that are already planning for that expansion. They will have the challenge to ensure there is quality in the online delivery, and that there is equal access to resources for all students. There will be much to do to ensure there is not a higher and a lower standard for the same post-nominal that they award. Furthermore, they must resist the temptation to make it a ‘cheap alternative’, just like we must resist that temptation in the West.

The possibility of a vastly greater number of students having access to quality local, contextualised theological education will be a great blessing for the church. In places where political and social restrictions limit people from study, such as in North Africa, this will be a bonus. In places where denominational leaders will not allow their clergy to leave the diocese, lest they fall prey to the attraction of a bigger city, this will be a bonus. Where pastors’ love for their people, perhaps gathered in a fragile community, keep them in situ, new options in quality online education will be a bonus.

Sometimes the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ brings good into being, through the most difficult of times. The times are still most difficult, perhaps even deathly, but resurrection moments become possible.

Perhaps this will be the case for theological education in the Majority World.

Conclusion

You will be pleased to know that several organisations are working cooperatively to help with these transitions. They are, naturally, organisations with deep relational connections already in place. They are assisting with funding for faculty salaries and to 'keep the lights on'. They are assisting with new servers, better bandwidth, and e-books. They are also assisting with a matrix of training opportunities for online education to get beyond 'clunky and inadequate' to functional and, in time, beyond functional, to quality online education.

Can I suggest a practical way to keep engaged in prayer and thankfulness is to note your daily newsfeed? When you see international stories focussed on one country or another, pray right then for the faculty members of the local Bible colleges. Pray that they will have wisdom, health, courage and most of all faithfulness for the times and place God has placed them in. Pray for them in whatever transition they might be going through. There are colleges in nearly all countries, so even unknowing of the details, you will be able to pray with insight.

Our sisters and brothers love to hear that we see, and understand, and pray. Who else could pray with deeper insight than the theological community of Australasia who are sharing in some of these same transitions?

Rev Dr Stuart Brooking
Head of Ministry and Practice,
ACT
Executive Director, Overseas
Council Australia



⇒ Geoff Treloar is now Reader, and his role of Director of Teaching and Learning is vacant. Some of this role is currently being undertaken by Cathy Harris.

⇒ Diana Tadjudin is back in her role of Deputy Registrar after maternity leave.

⇒ Elisa Norris has a new role as Administrative Coordinator – Graduation & Support Services.

⇒ And Rebekah Croucher got married – she is now Rebekah Wall.

ACT NEWS

The staff listing in this issue should reveal some news on close reading. Namely:

⇒ New Dean, James Dalziel has just started. Welcome!

⇒ We now have an IT Officer – welcome to Witali Klein.

⇒ Executive Assistant to the Dean, Tara Holdaway got married (so now Tara D'Onghia) and has left us to move back to New Zealand – we will miss her.

Being the Church When We Can't Go to Church

David Pohlmann



The writer to the Hebrews encouraged their audience not to give up the habit of meeting together (Heb 10:25). Despite having little information from scripture about the nature of early church meetings, we know that the first Christians gathered with other believers, learnt from the apostles, and cared for the vulnerable. Initially, they met in the temple and one another's homes. In their meetings: the apostles taught in word and deed, and the believers fellowshiped, shared meals, and prayed (Acts 2).

We also get a glimpse from Paul about the gatherings: believers were to contribute hymns, words of instruction, revelations, as well as messages via tongues accompanied by interpretations (1 Cor 14:26). But these days, we Christians tend just to go to church.

The first specifically built church buildings date to about the 3rd Century CE⁴⁸. So before that, it was harder to superimpose 'church the building' over 'church the people'. So, when did the notion of 'going to church' begin?

The first recorded instance of the phrase 'go to church' appears to have been made by Clement of Alexandria in the 2nd Century. Viola and Barna note that this phrase would have sounded foreign to the early church.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is probably fair to say that the church has struggled with the distinction between church-the-building and church-the-people for most of its existence.

Not only would the notion of *going to church* have been foreign to the early church, but I suspect that what many of us do in church these days would also seem novel to the early Christians.

The early church's pattern seems to have focussed on teaching (from the apostles), breaking bread (in homes), and contribution to the liturgy (hymns,

messages). This three-fold pattern of Word, Sacrament, and Body-life or Koinonia seems to have been the foci of the early church. Ministry of Word and Sacrament remain central to the contemporary church, but whatever happened to the *other* central focus?

In the sacramental churches, the Word is proclaimed but the liturgy finds its consummation in the Eucharist. In less sacramental or

nonsacramental churches, Communion may be observed. Still, the highlight of the liturgy (every church has one) appears to be in the Preaching of the Word, or perhaps the signs following in Pentecostal traditions. Both emphases have been helped along by the growth of what we may term 'clericalism' – something that has happened on both sides of the Reformation.

In going to church to receive the ministry of Word and Sacrament, what has happened to the body-life of the church that was evident in the earliest days – the *contributing of the body for the body*? Whether at one end of the ecclesial spectrum or the other, it has become easier to become a consumer of religious services.

I would argue that the events surrounding COVID-19 have made this consumer church even more evident. In these troubling times, the church's focus has been mainly on broadcasting pre-recorded liturgy AND live-streamed worship services complete with the all-important message.

I'm a teacher by trade, so you might think I would lap up the opportunity to reach out to a worldwide audience to give my 'lessons' online. But *as a teacher*, I know that interaction with learners is paramount. Unfortunately, online church has simply picked up where the church was and packaged it for one-way transmission via electronic media. Many of us pastors, priests, and ministers have become TV presenters and producers for a hungry ecclesia, which is locked-down rather than called-out. We run the risk of 'doing' church rather than 'being' the church.

⁴⁸<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/where-did-christians-worship>

⁴⁹ Viola, F and Barna, G. 2007. *Pagan Christianity?: exploring the roots of our church practice*. Tyndale, Carol Stream, Ill.

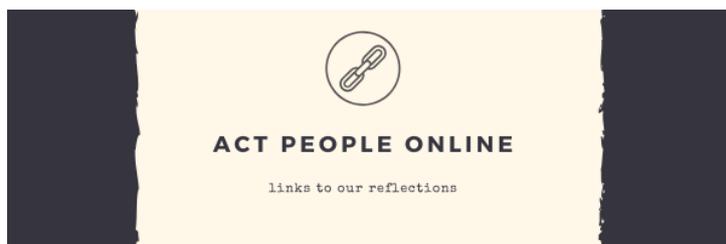
It is not that Christian leaders have not considered broader communication issues, but it may seem easier to broadcast an existing package – even if it means a crash course in social media, videography, and copyright licencing.

I pastor a small Uniting Church in North Queensland. We have found ways to be the church, rather than merely going to church. People have been upheld in prayer by the body, with amazing answers shared. The lonely and those in need have been cared for, as ways have been found within the restrictions. We have seen an increase in participation in the teaching service and prayer meetings, which were both struggling pre-COVID. One story is a beautiful example. One woman in her 80s has no internet. A friend of the same age stays on the phone with her during the streamed service, so that she is included. This woman without internet has been able to participate in the service herself through prayer and testimony.

We have been asking what it will look like to return to normal when the COVID-19 lockdowns are past. I pray to God that we will won't settle for a return to normal. I pray for a new normal in which:

- we long for real Christian community,
- the preached Word is focussed on, discussed, and put into practice,
- God is encountered in the fervent prayers of his people,
- the vulnerable are cared for,
- the ecclesia is called out for God's purposes, and
- and where the Sunday 'show' is no longer enough.

David Pohlmann is a Uniting Church minister and author, with a doctorate which focussed on school chaplaincy.



General media:

Karina Kreminski (Morling), ABC God Forbid, [Answering the call in a confusing world](#)

Vicki Lorrimar (Trinity QLD, ACT Winifred Merritt Fellow), ABC God Forbid, [How do we know what we know?](#). ABC Online [What hope? Dreams of immortality in the time of a pandemic](#)

Megan Powell du Toit (ACT) ABC God Forbid, [Is doubt the death of faith?](#)

Brian Rosner (Ridley), ABC Online, [Coping with coronavirus disappointments: Five lessons from Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), [Coping with coronavirus anxiety: Four lessons from Søren Kierkegaard](#)

Andrew Sloane (Morling), Canberra Times [Faith can help us lay our ghosts to rest](#)

Christian media:

Mike Bird (Ridley), Unbelievable: Premier Christian radio, [Christendom's response to Plague and Pandemic](#)

Louise Gosbell (MAC), Eternity News, [Church online has been great for our daughter with special needs](#)

Andrew Judd (Ridley), TGC, [Why Do Different Bibles Include Different Books in the Old Testament?](#)

Karina Kreminski (Morling), Ethos, [Is the Coronavirus God's grace to humanity?](#)

John McClean (Christ College), TGC, [On Not Preaching Resurrection this Easter. COVID-19 and the Common Good](#)

Emma Matheson (Morling student), Ethos, [A Doctor's plea: 'You Stay at Home for Us. I Stay at Work for You'](#). CPX Life & Faith, [Ode to Nurses](#)

Gary Millar (QTC), TGC, [Help TGCA Serve Christians Like You During COVID-19](#)

Tim Patrick (BCSA), TGC, [One Concrete Thing All Churches Should be Doing Right Now](#)

Megan Powell du Toit (ACT), Bible Society, Women of the Bible You Need to Meet

Brian Rosner (Ridley), TGC (AU & US), [Why Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?, 2 Reasons Jesus Died on the Cross, The Coronavirus Crisis as a Wilderness Experience](#)

Andrew Sloane (Morling), Ethos, ([Faith and Hope and Love in a time of Coronavirus](#))

Rob Smith (SMBC), TGC, ([Clarity Concerning the Cross: A Good Friday Reflection](#))

David Starling (Morling), TGC, ([When the Plague Came to Eyam: Four Lessons for the Church in a time of COVID-19](#))

Kamal Weerakoon (Christ College), TGC, ([Ministry in a 'Novel' Context \(two parts with Eugene Hor\)](#)).

Podcasts:

John Dickson (Ridley), ([Undeceptions podcast](#))

Megan Powell du Toit (ACT) & Michael Jensen, ([With All Due Respect podcast](#))

Jenny Salt (SMBC), ([Salt: Conversations with Jenny podcast](#))

PUBLICATIONS

Graduate Theses

James A. Blumenstock, *Strangers in a Familiar Land: A Phenomenological Study on Marginal Christian Identity*, Pickwick, 2020.

James graduated with a PhD from MST in 2017, and now serves as Dean and Associate Professor of Philosophical Theology at Asia Biblical Theological Seminary.

David Forrest Mitchell, *The Son of Man in Mark's Gospel: Exploring its Possible Connections with the Book of Ezekiel*, ACT Monograph Series, Wipf & Stock, 2020.

David graduated with an MTh from Trinity Perth in 2019, and now works as AFES Team Leader at Curtin University.

Consortium

Links to these are found on the ACT website in our [publications section](#).

Department of Bible and Languages

N.T. Wright & Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians*, Zondervan Academic, 2019. (Ridley)

AJ Culp, *Invited to Know God: The Book of Deuteronomy*, FaithLife, 2019. (Malyon)

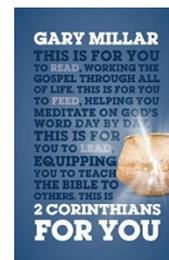
AJ Culp, *Memoir of Moses: The Literary Creation of Covenantal Memory in Deuteronomy*, Fortress Academic, 2019. (Malyon)



John de Jong & Csilla Saysell, eds., *Holding Forth the Word of Life: Essays in Honor of Tim Meadowcroft*, ACT Monograph Series, Wipf & Stock, 2020. Includes many contributions from Laidlaw people. (Laidlaw)

Christopher Fresch, *A Book-by-Book Guide to New Testament Greek Vocabulary*, Hendrickson Academic, 2019. (BCSA)

Mark J. Keown, *Galatians: A Commentary for Students*, Morphe, 2020. (Laidlaw)



Mark J. Keown, *The New Testament: A Taster*, Morphe, 2020. (Laidlaw)

Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, B & H Academic, 2020. (MST)

Gary Millar, *2 Corinthians For You: For Reading, For Feeding, For Leading*, Good Book Company, 2020. (QTC)

Gary Millar, John W. Olley & John L. Mackay, *ESV Expository Commentary: 1 Samuel–2 Chronicles (Volume 3)*, Crossway, 2019. (QTC, Vose)

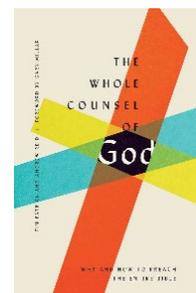
Department of Christian Thought and History

Paul A. Barker & Bradly S. Billings, *Making the Word of God Fully Known: Essays on Church, Culture, and Mission in Honor of Archbishop Philip Freier*, ACT Monograph Series, Wipf & Stock, 2020. (ACT)

Paul Molnar and Myk Habets, editors. *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*. T&T Clark, 2020. (Laidlaw)

Department of Ministry and Practice

Michael Frost, Darrell Jackson & David Starling eds. *Not in Kansas Anymore: Christian Faith in a Post-Christian World*, Morling/Wipf & Stock, 2020. Several Morling contributors.



Ian Hussey, ed., *Preaching with an Accent: Biblical Genres for Australian Congregations*: Morling, 2019. Many contributors from the ACT. (Malyon)

Gary Millar, *Need to Know: Your Guide to the Christian Life*, Good Book Company, 2020. (QTC)

Tim Patrick & Andrew Reid, *The Whole Counsel of God: Why and How to Preach the Entire Bible*, Crossway, 2020. (BCSA)

Robert S. Smith, *Come, Let Us Sing: A Call to Musical Reformation*, Latimer, 2020. (SMBC)

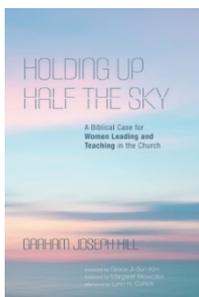
Beyond

Australia and New Zealand

[George Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs \(The Story Of God Bible Commentary Series\)*, Zondervan, 2020.](#) (Moore)

[Hugh Chilton, *Evangelicals and the End of Christendom: Religion, Australia and the Crises of the 1960s*, Routledge, 2019.](#) (University of Newcastle)

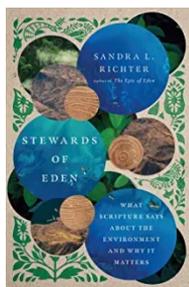
[Graham Joseph Hill, *Holding Up Half the Sky: A Biblical Case for Women Leading and Teaching in the Church*, Cascade 2020.](#) (Stirling)



Overseas

[N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, HarperCollins, 2020.](#) (Paperback now out)

[Oliver D. Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ*, IVP Academic, 2020.](#)



[Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*, IVP, 2020.](#)

[Nijay K. Gupta *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Studies*, Baker Academic, 2020.](#)

[Sandra L Richter, *Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says About the Environment and Why It Matters*, IVP Academic, 2020.](#)

[Richard Rice, *The Future of Open Theism: from Antecedents to Opportunities*, IVP Academic, 2020.](#)

[Gerald R. McDermott, ed. *The Future of Orthodox Anglicanism*, Crossway, 2020.](#)

OUR TEAM

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