

N E X U S

the ACT Research & Scholarship Magazine

The NEXUS Bookshelf

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JUNE 2024



June 2024

From the Editor

It's a great privilege to take over the responsibility of editing NEXUS from previous editor Megan Powell du Toit. As Megan herself wrote in her last issue with us, she was keen for NEXUS to provide a place for people to connect as community. In this respect, in stepping into the editor's role, I feel as though I have some large shoes to fill...and they are rather high-heeled shoes no less! But I do hope I can continue Megan's legacy in providing a space for us to celebrate achievements, share resources, offer encouragement, and be a source of information for the theological community in Australia.

This issue focuses broadly on the themes of ecclesiology and what it means for us to meet together as the people of God. I hope you enjoy the diversity of articles which have been included.

If you'd like to make a suggestion about a future theme or make a contribution to an upcoming issue, please contact me at the email address below.



Outgoing NEXUS
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Powell du Toit



Incoming NEXUS
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The NEXUS Bookshelf

New books by ACT Consortium Faculty and beyond

ACT Consortium Staff & Faculty

Michael Bird (Ridley), *A Bird's-Eye View of Luke and Acts: Context, Story, and Themes*, IVP, 2023.

Michael Bird (& N.T. Wright) (Ridley), *Jesus and the Powers: Christian political witness in an age of totalitarian terror and dysfunctional democracies*, SPCK, 2024.

Mark Durie (MST), *Double-Minded: How Sex Is Dividing the Australian Church*, Deror Books, 2023.

Kirk J. Franklin (MST), *The Mission Matrix: Mission Theologies for Diverse Mission Landscapes*, Regnum Books, 2023.

Scott Harrower (Ridley), *Trauma and Recovery in Early North African Christianity*, De Gruyter, 2024.

Andrew Judd (Ridley), *Playing with Scripture: Reading Contested Biblical Texts with Gadamer and Genre Theory*, Routledge, 2023.

Ruth Lukabyo (ed.) (Youthworks), *Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry: Identity, Church, Culture, and Discipleship*, ACT Monograph Series, Wipf & Stock, 2024.

Ian J. Maddock and Rachel Ciano (both SMBC), *10 Dead Gals You Should Know: Leaving an Enduring Legacy*, Christian Focus, 2023.

Have a new book coming out in the second half of 2024 and want it included in NEXUS? Let us know at research@actheology.edu.au.

Tim Silberman, (SMBC), *Engaging Neighbors and Nations: Factors Shaping Local Church Involvement in Mission*, Pickwick Publications, 2024.

Nicole Starling (Morling), *Evangelical Belief and Enlightenment Morality in the Australian Temperance Movement 1832-1930*, Routledge, 2024.

Kamina Wust (QTC, Ridley, MAC), *Song of Solomon (Matthias Bible Guide)*, Matthias Media, 2024.



Nicole Starling (Morling College)

Beyond the ACT

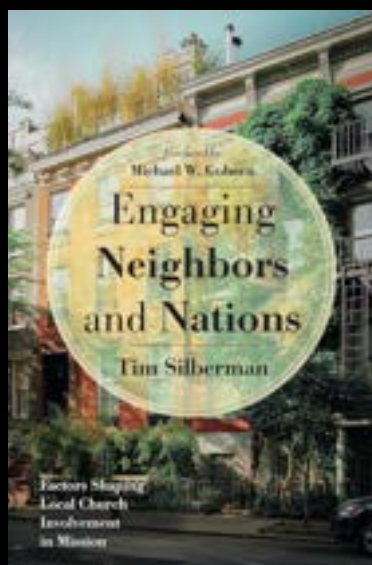
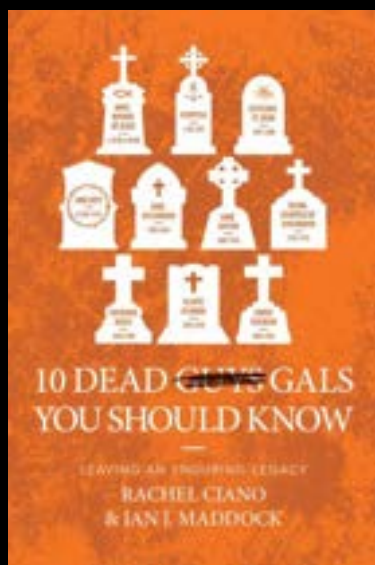
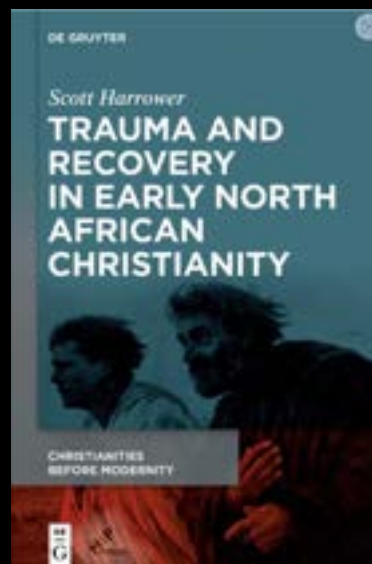
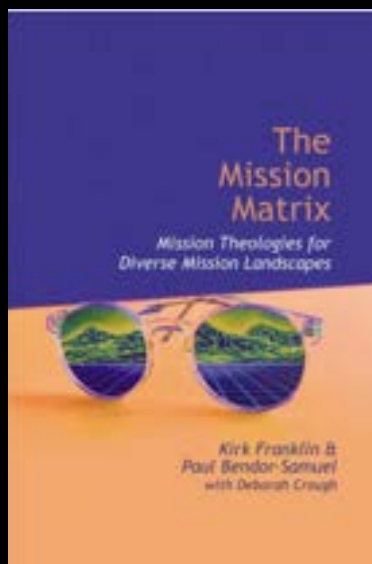
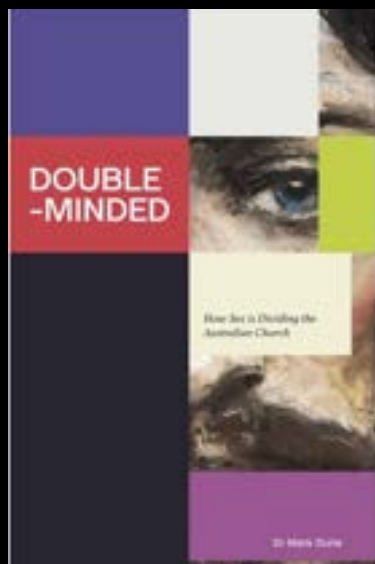
George Athas, *Bridging the Testaments: The History and Theology of God's People in the Second Temple Period*, Zondervan, 2023.

Alan Cadwallader, James R. Harrison, Angela Standhartinger, and Larry L. Welborn (eds.), *The Village in Antiquity and the Rise of Early Christianity*, T&T Clark, 2024.

Michael P. Jensen, *Subjects and Citizens: The Politics of the Gospel: Lessons from Romans 12-15*, Matthias Media, 2024.

Deborah R. Storie, Barbara Deutschmann, and Michelle Eastwood (eds), *Reading the Bible in Australia*, Wipf and Stock, 2024.

Patricia Weerakoon, with Robert Smith (SMBC) and Kamal Weerakoon, *The Gender Revolution: A Biblical, Biological and Compassionate Response*, Matthias Media, 2023.



“Don’t Put the Cart Before the Horse”

Ruth Lukabyo (Dean of Women, Youthworks College, Sydney)

I have had many conversations with parents who are anxious that their children are not behaving in a way that indicates they have faith, and the parents are terrified that they will fall away. Many of the parents at my church have switched churches looking for a youth group where their teenager can make friends with Christian peers. They make a sacrifice to leave beloved churches and friends to go to a church where their teenagers are comfortable and happy.

Ministers are also anxious about teenagers and want the kids in their churches to remain Christians. They know that it is vital that the gospel is passed down to the next generation and that if this doesn’t happen, the church will die.[1] They believe that “youth is the hope of the church.”[2] Many would like big numbers in their youth groups, reassuring them that young people are being reached.

These fears lead to pressure for youth ministry that attracts teenagers. It is driven by the question: “What shall we do with the teenagers?” and “What works?” Many leaders try to replicate the youth ministry experience that they had as young people. They might have gone to a big youth group with lots of fun outings and games, or to a small group with intense personal relationships and “D-and-Ms” (deep and meaningful conversations) about the Christian life.

In any model of youth ministry, retention of young people in church is an important measure of success. However, effective youth ministry should also be faithful to the scriptures not merely pragmatic - theology matters. Or as Chase Kuhn reminds us: Don’t put the cart before the horse.[3]

There are different theological perspectives on youth ministry in the world today. Some of the more influential of them

developed from an incarnational approach in the 1940s.[4] Youth ministers at this time were taught that as God was incarnate as a man, so to they should step into the shoes of the young person in their culture to communicate the gospel. They were taught that outreach should not be based on young people coming to us, but us going to them. [5]

In the 21st century this theology developed into what can be called a “neo-incarnational” approach. Andrew Root argued that in youth ministry relationships have been used in an instrumental and potentially coercive way. They were built to influence young people into making a decision to follow Jesus, employing a “theology of influence.”[6] Instead, Root argues for a more relational ministry that gives up the self for the young person. As Jesus gave up his glory in the incarnation, so too should a youth minister give up their life for the young person. A youth minister is to “place-share” with them, to step into the life and even the suffering of the young person, it is in this place that Jesus reveals himself. [7]

In a recent youth ministry conference that I attended, I saw the outworking of this approach. In one session, we were asked to turn to the person next to us and ask them: what do you think is the goal of youth ministry? I said: “Matthew 28:19-20, to make disciples and to teach them”? My friend was disturbed by my answer and said, “conversion is problematic” (a theology of influence), “we are called to journey with them, not teach them” (place sharing). I walked away wondering exactly what the difference was between this kind of ministry and just loving young people.

It is into this context that an Australian Evangelical theological perspective is important. The writers are convinced that



theology matters. That a theology that doesn't reflect the whole corpus of God's word will lead us astray in our ministry. This book does not focus merely on the incarnation, but biblical and systematic theology in all its fullness. The foundation is orthodox, reformed theology. This means there is no issue with seeking to teach young people that they are made in God's image, sinful, yet can be redeemed through Jesus' death and resurrection. We are not afraid of talking about sin, conversion, atonement. For example, Bill Salier is willing to talk about teaching sin in an age-appropriate way.[8]

Australian evangelicalism asserts that a doctrine of revelation, that God reveals himself ultimately through his word. Therefore, evangelical youth ministry is word-based. Youth ministers are not just caring leaders who journey with a young person in their pain. They are teachers of the word, they pray that young people may be confronted and encouraged with the gospel of Jesus. Youth ministers should therefore be trained in handling the word well (and encouraged to attend Youthworks College, haha).

Australian evangelicals, especially in the Anglican diocese of Sydney, have been influenced by what is called the theological "Knox-Robinson" view of Church. That is,

as the Greek word for church means "gathering" the New Testament writers understood church to be the local gathering of Christian believers. The primary mission of the church is therefore edifying the believers who are gathered before they are sent out to do gospel proclamation in the world. Shaped by this view of the church, Kuhn argues that ecclesiology should shape ministry to the young and that the gathering should include all the body of Christ, young and old. They are part of the body of Christ, and all have their part to play (1 Cor 12:12-30). Therefore, the church should not always be separated into age-and stage ministries such as youth group or Sunday School and an important characteristic of the church should be intergenerational ministry.[9]

One final theological principle that this book highlights is the centrality of discipleship. Although young and old are equal participants in the body of Christ, adults have a different part to play than children. Those that are older in the faith have a responsibility to guide, teach and model to the young what it means to live as a disciple. This is a principle that is beautifully portrayed in the Wisdom books. Escott and Spalding show how these books can be a wonderful resource to adults who have had more experience and wisdom to guide young disciples.

I have highlighted three theological and biblical principles that are foundational to Australian evangelical youth ministry: word-centred, intergenerational, and discipleship of the young. There are many more, but these three are in stark contrast to the principles that drive much of youth ministry throughout the world. It is our hope that by being guided by theological principles that God might use youth ministers to practice faithful and effective ministry and that many young people might come to love Jesus and grow in maturity within the body of Christ.

Footnotes:

[1] The retention rates of young people 15+ whose parents attend a church in the Sydney Anglican Diocese is 64%, that is 36% have stopped attending church. National statistics of the wider church are more dire. NCLS 2021.

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer critiqued this view of youth ministry in his eight theses on youth work. He argued that, "... the future of the church is not youth itself but rather the Lord Jesus Christ alone." Scharffenorth & Rasmussen (eds.), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 12, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 515.

[3] Chase Kuhn, "The Doctrine of the Church and Age specific ministries," Ruth Lukabyo, *Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry*, ACT Monograph Series, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2023), 64.

[4] Tim Gough, "Has the 'Incarnational Model' Been a Theologically Helpful Influence on Modern Youth Ministry?" *Journal of Youth and Theology* 18 (2019).

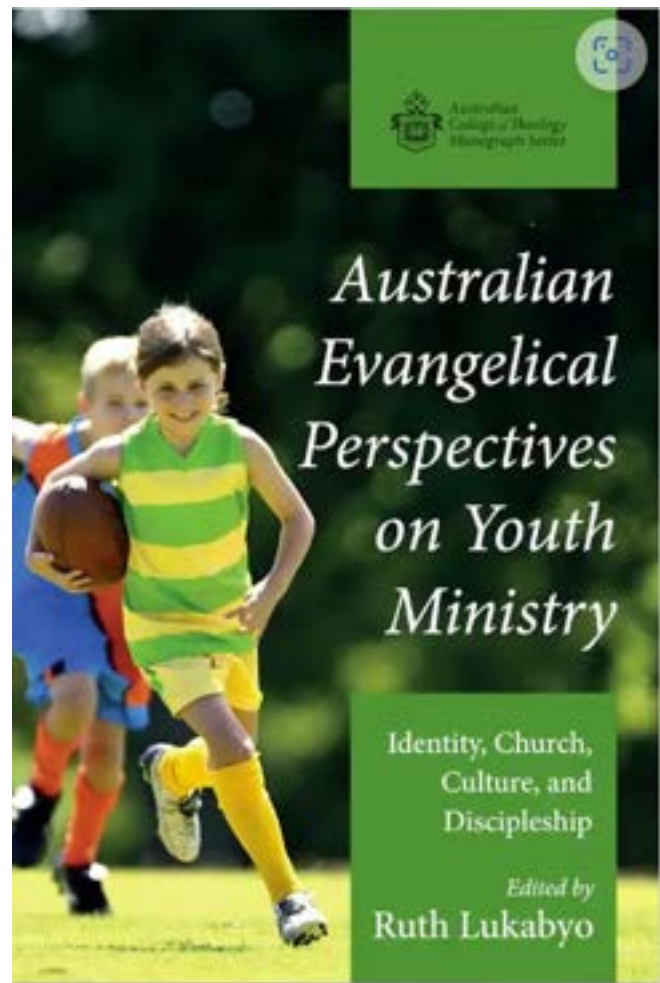
[5] Pete Ward, *Youth Culture and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Marshall Pickering, 1992), 30.

[6] Andrew Root, *The Relational Pastor: Sharing in Christ by Sharing Ourselves* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 43-44.

[7] Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 83.

[8] Bill Salier, "Faithful Teaching about Sin in the Light of Child Development," in Lukabyo, *Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry*, 204-21.

[9] Chase Kuhn. "The Doctrine of the Church and Age Specific Ministries," in Lukabyo, *Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry*, 79-82.



Like what you read? Check out the latest volume in the ACT Monograph Series: Ruth Lukabyo (ed.), *Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry: Identity, Church, Culture, and Discipleship*.

Church & U2 Concerts: Exploring what ‘family’ means for the local church

Tim Beilharz (Lecturer, Youthworks College, Sydney)

Amongst the metaphors for the church that the New Testament writers use are that of ‘family’ and ‘household.’

Jesus instructs his disciples to address God as Father (Matt. 6:9) and Paul emphasises the adoption we have as sons and daughters in the family of God (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15,23). As a gathered church, Paul talks about Christians as the ‘household of faith’ (Gal. 6:10) or the ‘household of God’ (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; cf. 1 Pet. 4:17).

Over the last 20 years, the Family Ministry movement has articulated the reciprocal principles of ‘family as church’ and ‘church as family’. The first of these principles—family as church—focuses on the discipleship of children in the Christian home. Parents are the most significant spiritual influence in their child’s life. Therefore, Family Ministry has advocated for the active equipping of parents for this role.[1]

The second of these principles—church as family—focuses on the role of the church congregation to be a family-like environment for all people; children, teens,

adults, and seniors, singles and married, divorced and widowed, those with children and those without. As the New Testament makes clear, all are members of the household of God.

The right question that flows from an understanding of ‘church as family’ is, what does it mean for the church to practically express its household nature, day by day, week by week, year by year?

Diana Garland wrote one of the key textbook treatments of the Family Ministry movement in her aptly titled Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide, first published in 1999 and updated with a second edition in 2012. Whilst the book is now hard to find and the ministry conversation has (helpfully, in my opinion) moved to a more comprehensive paradigm of intergenerational ministry, Garland’s writing provides helpful analysis of the ‘church as family’ question which we can continue to benefit from today.

Garland begins by describing three social and practical benefits that well-functioning



families provide their members.

- A family meets the needs of attachment and belonging.
- A family shares life purposes and emotional and physical care.
- A family provides a base of knowledge, resources, time and help.

Of course, our communities are full of families which are marred by the destructive power of sin and fail to provide these benefits to lesser or greater extents. However, just as the perfect Fatherhood of God is not diminished by the failure of earthly fathers, the painful failure of families on their members need not detract from our understanding of the perfection of the family of God and our seeking to express this in our local church communities. In fact, one of the most effective ways that Christians can minister to those whose own families have failed in any of these ways is to foster a strong, functional, and practically supportive community in the local church.

The danger, however, is that our churches may not provide these benefits, because they are not sufficiently behaving as families. This is where another of Garland's insights is particularly profound. Garland explains the difference between a family and a pseudo-community.

'Pseudo-communities form when my interests and lifestyle rubs shoulders with yours, but no real community is formed, no real friendships are formed. We may be involved in the same team, but there is no invitation to share one another's lives and no sense of responsibility or sense of obligation of one towards the other...

Pseudo-communities are based on one-dimensional commonality rather than multi-salient relationships that characterise (real) community.'

Several years ago, my wife and I had tickets to see U2 at the Sydney Olympic Stadium. We knew in advance that the first few hundred people who made it through the turnstiles when the gates opened would be allowed into the exclusive VIP section

which was enveloped by the runway arms of the stage. So, we both took the day off work and lined up outside the stadium from 9am for the 6pm open.

We and the growing crowd who lined up with us formed a sense of community. We all had aligned purpose and joy. We were chatting to those around us, minding each other's bags when we needed food or toilet breaks, singing along to our favourite songs, and all cheering in anticipation when we heard The Edge do soundcheck[2]. We streamed into the stadium together, danced and sang for hours with each other, cheered for an encore together, and then... went home, never to see each other again.

For close to 14 hours, my new gang of 500 closest friends and I had formed a pseudo-community based on common interests and geographical proximity. But I had no real desire to get to know these people, to share life together beyond that day. Once the event was over, we had no anticipation that we would meet each needs of attachment and belonging, share life purposes, or provide a base of knowledge, resources, time and help.

Churches can be the same. I love Jesus. I love singing praises, reading the word in community, hearing the word expounded in a sermon, and the breakfast served at my church is second to none. I also love that my church gathering is well attended. There is a buzz in the air, plenty of people to chat to and exchange pleasantries with. The danger is that my church could just be a pseudo-community of like-minded individual disciples who also enjoy these things, rather than a household of faith that actively takes up the 'sense of responsibility or sense of obligation of one towards the other'.

How would I know if my experience is closer to 'church as family' or "church as pseudo-community"?

Here are a few questions you could ask:



U2 at Sphere, Las Vegas, October 2024. Photo by Louise Gosbell

- How well do you know the other members of your church? Do you feel that you belong at church? Is it an essential community for you? So much so, that it is difficult to imagine spending a weekend without seeing other congregation members.
- When you need help (physical, social, resource, knowledge), are these the people who are first in mind to provide it?
- Do you trust the people at your church to the extent that you can be truly vulnerable with them, confessing your sins and bearing each other's burdens?
- conversation starters, ask them how they became a Christian and who were the influential people in them becoming so.
- Test the waters of vulnerability. Ask someone at church you have a good relationship with to pray for you. Share what your needs are and then ask if they could pray for you then and there, not just in some ideal future time. Return the favour. Set a reminder on your phone to pray again during the week, and send the person a text to let them know that you have continued to pray for them.

However you would answer these questions, consider the following ways in which you could build a stronger sense of 'church as family'.

- Take 10 minutes out of your week to sit down, distraction-free, and consider your church community. Write down what you appreciate about your church, who the people are that you know well, and who you don't. Consider who in your church you would miss if you weren't to see them for 1-2 months.
- Rather than drifting between a number of brief and surface level conversations with 8-10 people after your church service, go deeper with 1-2 people. If you're stuck for

However you would answer these questions, consider the following ways in which you could build a stronger sense of 'church as family.'

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Footnotes:

[1] Two excellent books in this field are Timothy Paul Jones (2011), *Family Ministry Field Guide: How the Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* and Reggie Joiner (2009), *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide*.

[2] Yes, I know it was more likely to be one of his many guitar techs, but let's not let facts get in the way of a great memory.

Romans as Ecclesial Theology: Building Multiethnic Missional Churches

Michael Bird (Academic Dean, Ridley College, Melbourne)

Paul's Epistle to the Romans is arguably the densest and most debated book of the New Testament. It is a delight to read, but it is hard work to teach through and preach from. Almost every paragraph contains caverns of controversy, but also theological gems for those who dare to dig deep enough into those caverns to find them. There are so many famous and favourite verses that we can recall, like "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8) or "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1). Studying Romans is daunting yet rewarding.

What Is Romans About?

But what is Romans really about? What is the big idea behind the letter? And what is the main thing we should take away from it?

A common view in evangelical circles is that Romans is about the road to salvation, sinners discovering the love and mercy of God, so much so that you can sweep up several verses from the letter to create a charming little evangelical tract about how to get saved. The Roman road to salvation usually goes something like this:

1. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:23).
2. The punishment for sin is eternal death (6:23).
3. The free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus (6:23 again).
4. People are saved by confessing with their lips that Jesus Christ is Lord.
5. Those who are justified through faith have peace with God (5:1).

I'm partly sympathetic to this perspective. After all, Paul in this letter does say a lot about the gospel, about God, about atonement, about faith, about salvation and eternal life. But the fallacy of composition tells us to beware of the view that what is true of the part is really true of the whole. Yes, parts of Romans do tell us how to get saved, but that does not mean that this is the main point of the whole letter. Christian blogger and scholar Andrew Perriman points out the deficiencies of the Roman road of salvation. "To start with," he says, "you can hardly call it a road. Someone has dug up half-a-dozen paving stones from Paul's argument and laid them in a line. That's not a road. It's not even much of a path."¹

I want to suggest to you that Romans has a different purpose and a different application, beyond an artificially constructed neo-Puritan and hyper-individualist account of salvation, something far more profound to my mind. I submit to you that Romans is really about creating a messianic missional community where, despite painful differences and manifold diversities, there is a reciprocal acceptance of one another and a shared commitment to unity. Paul's Letter to the Romans is really a missional letter that calls on the Jews and gentiles in the Roman churches to be united in the gospel, to receive one another in faith, and to come together to support the spread of the apostolic preaching of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

For the Jew First and Also for the Greek

This theme of unity, specifically the interlocking destinies of Jews and gentiles in Christ, is rehearsed across the letter. When Paul says that the gospel is for "the Jew first

and also to the Greek;” he implies that the gospel is not for the Greek instead of the Jew (1:16). The whole premise behind Romans 1:18-3:20 is that Jews and gentiles both stand condemned before God for their transgression. There is “no distinction” since Jews and gentiles have both sinned (3:22-23). On the flip side, there is “no distinction between Jew and Greek” in God's saving action in Christ because “one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved;” and “the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him” (10:10, 12). God is the God of Jews and gentiles and “he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith” (3:30). Paul describes Abraham as the forefather of all believers, whether Jewish or gentile, since God's “purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised” (4:11-12).

I need to stress that this is not unity as an abstract idea; this is unity for those who live a tenuous existence in the tenement house churches in Rome, where disease, destitution, and death are only ever a few hours away. This is unity where Christians, both Jews and gentiles, have received a hostile treatment from Roman synagogues for their messianic faith. This is unity amidst the expulsion and return of Jewish Christian leaders to the city of Rome in AD 49 and 54, which undoubtedly affected the social dynamics in the Roman churches in the interim (see Acts 18:1-2). This is unity in a context where it would have been easy for Christian gentiles to imbibe and replicate the anti-Jewish ethos of Roman elites who despised the Jews for being distinctive, different, insulated, and separated from wider society. This is unity when there was

dispute and difference as to whether the regulations of the torah remained incumbent on all believers. This is unity at a time when the Roman churches could potentially fragment either along ethnic lines or according to divisions over torah observance.

This is why the climax of the letter, the summit of Paul's exhortation, is Romans 15:7-9: “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” Paul's point here is that the Messiah came to serve the Jews, to make good the divine promises to Israel and to the patriarchs, so that Abraham might have a multiethnic family united in faith. The end result is that the gentiles would actually get saved, glorify God for his mercy, and obtain the obedience of faith. Accordingly, if the Messiah has welcomed Jews and gentiles into the family of Abraham, drawn them into God's electing purposes, made them members of his own body, the church, then they must welcome one another!

What Does This Church Look Like Today?

What does this kind of church look like today? Well imagine if a small church, either in the inner city or perhaps in a rural town, had an influx of Christian refugees from Syria and Sudan. Imagine if they came to this church, to your church, with their strange language, their recent experience of trauma, with strange ideas about worship, peculiar customs, personal complaints about things like having a US flag in the church, or an insistence that the minister should wear robes. Would you segregate them? Let them worship by themselves in the church hall after the main service with all the nice



normal American folks? Even worse, what happens if more and more refugees arrive and take out membership, and suddenly you've got all these Syrians and Sudanese becoming the majority? You are only one congregational vote from changing your name from Fifth Baptist Church to St. John Chrysostom Community Church!

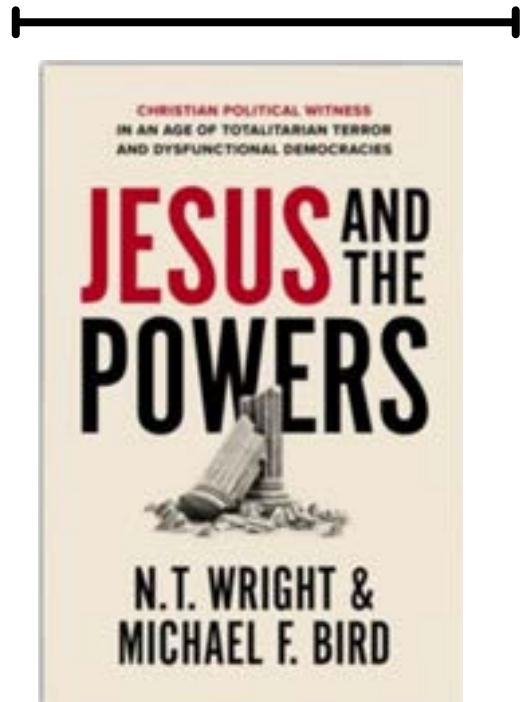
Well, this is what Romans is about! This is where you have to figure out how to “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (14:19), discern how “each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour” (15:2), and above all consider how you can live in “harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:5-6).

Rather than allowing our churches to be tribally divided, ghettocized by race or class, Paul’s vision in Romans is for the lordship of Jesus Christ to be expressed in a physical expression of unity, amidst ethnic diversity and theological differences, so that everyone might glorify God for his mercy. Paul’s Letter to the Romans tell us a lot about salvation, but it is principally about how the saved, Jews and gentiles, Americans and Arabs, Africans and Latinos, are drawn closer together as they are drawn closer to Jesus Christ.

This article first appeared as a chapter in Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica’s *Preaching Romans: Four Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019). Reproduced here with permission from the author.

Footnotes:

1. Andrew Ferriman, “What’s Wrong with the ‘Romans Road’ to Salvation?,” May 25, 2012, <http://www.postost.net/2012/os/what-s-wrong-romans-road-salvation>.



See also Mike’s latest publication with N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Powers*.

The Whole People of God - What About Older People?

Ben Boland (Visiting Lecturer, Mary Andrews College, Sydney)

Does the whole people of God include older people? I suspect if we were asked this question, most of us would instinctively answer YES and with good reasons. We can attest to the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, the Scriptures' repeated commands to care for widows and the commandment to honour our parents.

The more challenging question for us as theological educators is does this belief shape the training we provide? If the photographs on ACT college websites are an accurate reflection of the student body, then all our students are of working age. This is probably due to the focus of Australian & New Zealand colleges on training people for full time ministry. Some colleges have programs specifically aimed at older students, such as Morling's 'Encore.' However, the question remains - are we neglecting older people?

I am not suggesting we should be focusing on courses and training just for older people, though given the global decline in theological enrolments this may be worth exploring. But I want to propose the idea that we need to be equipping both our

students and denominations to care about, and have the basic skills to minister with, older people. We also need to ask, are we producing research and resources to equip and support ministry in this context?

There are two hurdles regarding training and researching ministry with older people: focus and resources. I will outline both of these and their limitations.

One of the strengths of the ACT is the specialisation across the different colleges (e.g. SMBC is 'mission' focused, Youthworks is focused on training people for 'children's and youth ministry' etc). Within these specialisations, the number of subjects which can be taught in a single degree (let alone certificate or diploma) is finite. Certainly, no college can be all things to all people and the cost of introducing everything is lack of depth. Besides, we hope our graduates will be 'lifelong learners' via ministry experience, conferences and MA programs. But the question must be asked, what does this mean for thinking about the place of older people in ministry and mission?



In addition to not all graduates being autodidacts, the challenge is ministry with older people is largely not a priority for most churches and denominations. But this is aberrant if older people are a valuable part of the people of God and if ministry aims to be intergenerational. If we, as theological educators, do not teach that ministry with older people is important, who will? We do have an ACT unit at AQF 5 on ministry with older people which runs regularly at Mary Andrews College. However, this has not been developed to run at other AQF levels. I am also not aware of any Australian conferences with a focus on older people in ministry despite the global ageing population. From a research perspective while most 'traditional' theological questions have a plethora of resources available, the theological questions relating to growing older are just starting to be explored. Thus, the need for training and research on ministry with older people is profound, but the question remains how can this training be resourced?

The short answer is this question relates not just to ministry with older people but to all ministry training. At the risk of quoting Malcom Turnbull, we need to work on being 'nimble' in how we teach - which is clearly easier to say than do! On one level COVID-19 has helped us in that it has forced us to provide non-face to face options. This change is problematic for colleges which have followed Bonhoeffer's emphasis on theological training in community. When I was studying full-time at Bible College, I struggled to be properly engaged in both my local church and Bible College communities and be an active husband and father. Perhaps an emphasis on students being focused on their church community has merit?

Another advantage of moving to more online options are making it possible for students outside metropolitan areas and overseas to engage and for specialist

lecturers to be accessed. The topic of specialist lecturers raises the question of more collaboration between ACT colleges in running specialist units such as those on ministry with older people or ministry with people with disability. There may also be scope for greater industry engagement. For example, Morling's Chaplaincy and Spiritual care relies on partnership with BaptistCare and other industries. HammondCare has a close relationship with John Swinton, who is the preeminent dementia theologian. What other collaborative opportunities might be possible? Could a number of ACT colleges work together to host a seminar or conference on ministry with older people or ministry in the midst of dementia? Such events could be run in collaboration with Christian aged care providers. Exactly how to be 'nimble' is beyond both this article and my expertise, so I will leave it there. But hopefully even these introductory suggestions might provide some food for thought.

Finally, it is worth considering one final point; while the issue of funding training is a perennial one, that should not be the barrier that prevents us from contemplating ways to include the training of older people or the training about working alongside older people in ministry. Given the importance of care of the widow in Scripture, perhaps our starting point should not be one of funding but instead to prayerfully ask God what we should do and to provide the resources.



Want to find out more? Ben recently recorded an episode of CPX's Life and Faith podcast: "[*A person with dementia is still human.*](#)" See also "Should Urban Mission Include a focus on Older People?" *Australian Journal of Mission Studies* 18.1 (2024):51-55.

Upcoming Events 2024

JUNE

17 June: BCSA (Adelaide), Centenary Public Lectures, "Eschatology in Luke-Acts," Suzie Smith.

17 June: Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute / Mary Andrews College (Sydney), "Living with the Impact of Childhood Trauma" with Ruth Holt. Online and in-person.

18 June: Catholic Theological College (Melbourne), "Digital Congregations in a Post-Christian Future: Understanding the Embrace of Technology during the Pandemic," with Professor Heidi A. Campbell. Online and in-person.

24 June: Morling College (Sydney), 2024 Preaching Conference "Authentic Preaching in an Artificial Age." Online and in-person.

24 June: BCSA (Adelaide), Centenary Public Lectures, "Why Theological Education is NOT Ambitious Enough," Rev. Dr. David Wright.

24 June: BCSA (Adelaide), Centenary Public Lectures, "Preserving the Gospel Message in the Early Church," Glenn Clarke.

30 June-3 July: ANZATS Conference (Adelaide) - the annual conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Studies, "Connection and Community."

JULY

1 July: BCSA (Adelaide), Centenary Public Lectures, "Delighting in the Words of God: Why We Learn the Biblical Languages," Dr Chris Fresch.

4 July: Melbourne School of Theology, Public Lecture, "The Spirit in Romans: Source of Power and Pain for Christians" with Professor Steve Walton.

7 July: BCSA (Adelaide), Centenary Public Lectures, "A Broader Friendship: John's Transformation of Secular Friendship," Rev Dr Mark Kulikovsky.

15 July: BCSA (Adelaide), Centenary Public Lectures, "Retribution: A Key to Understanding the Old Testament Wisdom Literature," Dr Luke Wisley.

22 July: Ridley College (Melbourne), "Paul Within Paganism" Symposium.

22 July: Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute / Mary Andrews College (Sydney), "Social Anxiety" with Lauren Errington. Online and in-person.

24-25 July: Reformed Theological College (Melbourne), 2024 Preaching Conference, "Preaching Colossians & the Supremacy of Christ."

Upcoming Events 2024

JULY continued

31 July-2 August: SMBC (Sydney), 2024 Global Missions Conference, "One Body: Unifying the Global Church in Mission." Online or in-person.

31 July-2 August: The International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry (IASYM) is holding its next Australia-New Zealand regional conference at Carey Baptist College (Auckland).

AUGUST

2-3 August: Ridley College (Melbourne) are hosting a Women's Writing Retreat. The retreat will run 9:30am-5pm each day with attendees able to register for one or both days.

5-9 August: Moore Theological Sydney (Sydney) are hosting their annual Moore College Lectures on theme of Galatians: The Battle for the Truth of the Gospel with guest speaker Tom Schreiner.

9-10 August: Melbourne School of Theology are hosting the Paradosis Conference which is focused on the interplay between science and Christian faith.

10 August: Brisbane School of Theology are hosting the BST Safeguarding Children Conference.

27 August: Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute / Mary Andrews College (Sydney), Seminar: "Suicide Prevention," with Sarah Piper and Keith Condie.

For a more detailed list of events, see the calendar on the ACT website. Please scroll down the page for the 2024 calendar.

Women Scholars Breakfast at ANZATS

The ACT are hosting a Women Scholars Breakfast during the ANZATS Conference in Adelaide. The Women's Breakfast will be on Tuesday 2nd July at 7:30am. The breakfast is free for all women scholars and HDR students and is not restricted to ACT college staff or students. Registration info for the breakfast can be found here.

Australian Research Theology Grants

The Australian Research Theology Foundation ("ARTFinc") welcomes funding applications (max. \$10,000) for religious and educational projects within Australia. Themes can range from academic theology to Christian education at the grassroots. More info can be found at artfinc.org.au. All applications to be sent to artfinc@gmail.com

Higher Education News

Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education

The Australian Government are introducing a National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence. The new National Code has a multi-pronged approach to create higher education communities free from gender-based violence. This includes establishing a National Student Ombudsman and the requirement that higher education providers embed whole-of-organisation approaches to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. This will be required of all higher education providers registered with TEQSA. You can read the draft code [online](#).

Assessment Reform for the Age of Artificial Intelligence

TEQSA has published guiding principles and propositions to support the sector in considering the risks and opportunities of generative artificial intelligence (genAI). The paper, [Assessment Reform for the Age of Artificial Intelligence](#), can be found on the TEQSA website.

Working with Children Week 17-23 June 2024

The NSW Office of the Children's Guardian Children's Working with Children Week serves as reminder that children are safer when organisations are transparent about their practices with parents, carers and families and consult them on children's development. For guidance on how to ensure our organisations can do their part in the promotion of safe spaces for children, see the [Office of the Children's Guardian website](#).

Recent Articles

Students' Perception of Education Quality Tied to Feelings of Belonging from "Inside Higher Ed"

A recent U.S. study has found that student satisfaction rates are higher for students who feel a sense of belonging in their institution.

Why Do International Students Choose to Study in Australia from "The Conversation"

A recent Australian study addresses the top reasons international students are drawn to Australian higher education providers.

Uncovering Indigenous Insights: Let's Research Together from "The Times Higher Education"

This article suggests that meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities requires researchers to focus on collaborative and participatory approaches.

Conferrals

December 2023 - May 2024

Doctor of Philosophy

Jason Park - Ridley College

“Onesimus as Paul’s Freedman: The Letter to Philemon in the First-Century Roman Economic and Social World”

This thesis challenges the widespread belief that Paul interceded on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave, asking Philemon to forgive him and take him back as a Christian brother. The story of Onesimus, Philemon, and Paul, as this thesis reconstructs it, is as follows. Philemon bought Onesimus on a loan, but he ran off for freedom, leaving Philemon in debt. As Onesimus was still on the run, he happened upon Paul and came to faith in Jesus through Paul. Seeing his potential for ministry, Paul then offered to pay the debt and other related costs or penalties for Philemon in exchange for the transfer of Onesimus to him, with the intention to manumit him himself as his freedman. However, Paul’s ultimate concern was not manumission. Rather, he wanted Onesimus and Philemon to leave behind their past as slave and master and redefine their relationship as ‘partners’ and ‘colleagues’ in the gospel enterprise, serving Jesus as their common, ultimate patron. Besides the new reading of the letter, this thesis makes other contributions to NT scholarship, including a new perspective on Paul and slavery, Paul’s ecclesiology, and the new concept of ‘relational debt’ to explain vertical relationships in the ancient social world and the language of faith in the Bible.

Master of Theology (Research)

Grant Jones - Morling College

“God the Creator in Ephesians”

The way that God’s identity and work as creator is portrayed in the New Testament as a whole represents a gap in New Testament scholarship. This is despite the fact that God’s identity as creator was a fundamental doctrine of second temple Judaism and early Christianity. Within the study of Ephesians and its theology, little systematic attention has been given to the way in which God himself is portrayed within the letter, especially in relation to the contribution God’s work as creator makes to the way in which his identity is constructed. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the ways in which God is portrayed as the creator in Ephesians and the contribution of God’s identity as creator to the theology and rhetoric of the letter. This project involves exegesis of selected passages in Ephesians. It is found that God’s identity as creator plays a significant role in the selected passages. The identity of God as the creator of the cosmos is closely connected within the letter to his eternal purposes before creation and his intention of summing up all things in Christ. The church is described as holding a significant place within the creator’s eternal purposes, with creation language used to describe God’s saving work and the uniting of Jews & gentiles in one body. Paul understands his calling in terms of the creator’s eternal purposes and expresses this in prayer. God’s work and identity as creator helps to tie the two halves of the letter together, ground the letter’s exhortations in an all-encompassing grand narrative and assuring the readers that the purposes of God will not be defeated by the powers that oppose them.

Our Team

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Registry, Quality & Finance Division

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Academic Administration Officer

Lissa Philip

IT Systems Manager

Witali Klein

Executive Assistant to the Executive Team

Anusha De Silva

Quality

Quality Manager

Lissa Philip

Academic Quality Officer

Stephen Sarkoezy

Office News

In recent news, Anusha De Silva joined the ACT team in the role of Executive Assistant to the Executive Team.

ACT Dean & CEO Professor James Dalziel will be on study from July to December 2024. Deputy Dean, Dr Edwina Murphy, will serve as Acting Dean for this period.