

The Symphony of Theological Education

Dr Madison Pierce — page 3

Theological Education: Facing the Unknown

Dr Sydney Tooth — page 5

The Vitality of Good Theological Education

Rev Prof Dorothy Lee — page 7

Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla: Nurturing the Faith

Rev Dr Chris Porter — page 9

essentials

Summer 2023

EFAC AUSTRALIA

Essentials is the journal of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion. Promoting Christ-centred biblical ministry.





Training and equipping Christian ministers, workers, and the church is the endeavour of the whole of the church working together. From ministers to expound scriptures and pastorally care for their congregations, mentors to come alongside and together with sisters and brothers in all stages of life, and those extra-congregational and para-church groups and organisations who support the building up of local churches and mission.

However, in this ecosystem the work of theological colleges is often shrouded in mystery, either seen as some hallowed ivory tower or a strange realm far removed from the realities of the local church. Indeed, at times there has been significant distrust of theological colleges for these very reasons.

Yet the work of theological colleges is important on two fronts, and neither are of the chalk and talk variety. First, the work of theological education helps our churches to see the breadth of God's mission for His world, across the scope of human history and through the various means He engages through the church. Second, as a third space outside of the local church it draws together members of local churches to gather around a shared goal of understanding God better. Both of these—

—amongst many more—aim to keep us from myopia and also from the challenges of hubris.

This edition of Essentials aims to peel back the curtain somewhat, to reveal the great scope of theological education around our world. Unfortunately—and ironically—the length of this issue is slightly shorter than normal, owing to an eleventh hour withdrawal of one article, due to a very sad situation in a theological college which only reinforces the distrust of these institutions. Nevertheless, those articles that remain serve to lift our eyes to the scope of God's work in theological education.

REV DR CHRISTOPHER PORTER, MELBOURNE

EDITOR

Essentials is published by EFAC Australia.

www.efac.org.au
ISSN 1328-5858.

Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of EFAC nor of the editor.

Material is copyright and may not be reproduced without permission.

Scripture taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Editor for this Issue: Gavin Perkins
Sub-editing, printing and distribution:

Chris Appleby

Journal design: Clare Potts

Issue layout: Doug Rolfe

Editorial correspondence

essentialsd@gmail.com

To notify of a change of address,

contact Rev Chris Appleby

20 Gordon St Fairfield VIC 3078

cappleby@cappleby.net.au

Photo credits (Unsplash): Front cover - Christopher Porter, p5 Edward Cisneros, p6 James Coleman, p8 Clay Banks, p9 Alexis Brown, p11 Mike Fox, p13 Nico Smit, p13 Matt Palmer, p14 Jessica Mangano, p16 whosgod.com.au, p17 Stephen Radford.

What is EFAC?

EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion. The purpose of EFAC is to maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia. The aims of EFAC are:

1. To promote the ultimate authority, the teaching and the use of God's written word in matters of both faith and conduct.
2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.
3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.
4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.
5. To provide a forum, where appropriate: a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations and publications.
6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.
7. To coordinate and encourage EFAC branches/groups in provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Church in Australia.

Essentials subscriptions and EFAC membership

You can subscribe to Essentials for \$25 per annum, which includes the 4 print issues delivered to you. Go to www.efac.org.au and click the membership menu tab. Follow the link to sign up as a member and click the Essentials only option.

Membership of EFAC includes a subscription to Essentials, which may be in pdf form in some states. EFAC membership is arranged differently in different states, but is available through the membership menu tab at the EFAC website. The rates are:

\$50 per annum full cost

\$25 per annum for students, missionaries or retired persons.

Subscriptions, memberships and donations all at:

www.efac.org.au



essentials



The Symphony of Theological Education

DR MADISON PIERCE,
WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, MI



Dr Madison Pierce

pictured

Surely there is a sense in which nothing stands outside the concept of “theological education.” As a child, I learned the gift of love and security reflected in the actions of my parents. This taught me about God. As I grew and learned about the natural world—the rocks and seas and animals—I learned about the intricacies of creation. This taught me about God too. And I could, of course, go on forever.

The idea that we learn about God through a near limitless number of avenues is a beautiful reflection of the expansiveness of God and his reach. Nothing is beyond his grasp, and thus every moment is a moment with him and a part of our theological education.

And yet I am a professional theological educator, and I do not believe that nature walks alone equip us sufficiently for ministry.

So what is the difference? Why in a created world that reveals God should someone pursue formal theological education? And why in an era where information is so readily available? What value is added by spending countless hours sitting in a classroom, studying, reading, and writing?

These are the questions of so many today. Seminary and other forms of theological education are supposedly the ways of the past. The future is learning through being in the world and through curating one’s own educational experience online.

So, again, what makes formal theological education different? Three things come to mind.

Theological education provides access to mentors.

When a student walks into a classroom, they have an experience designed by someone with expertise. The readings and lectures—when planned thoughtfully—flow together like a perfectly crafted playlist. The architect of this experience, the professor, raises problems and solutions that shift the tone and weight of the conversation like the move between ballad and bop.

But the professor is present for the experience of this oscillation. They gently guide the student through experiences of dissonance with what they previously held

to be true, and when the student has that moment of connection with the material that represents growth and understanding, the professor can affirm the progress. Other students watch and participate in this process by asking their own questions and bearing witness

Nevertheless, some professors do not curate these kinds of experiences, and they do not deserve to be called “mentor.” They understand their primary role to be one of content delivery, and a student would learn just as much from that professor if they found their content in a video on the internet. Mentoring takes time and demands love in the classroom and beyond.

Theological education provides access to peers.

Although I myself am a professor (and hopefully a mentor), I firmly believe that the most important people in my students’ education are their peers. In the illustration I provided above, I shared a relatively vertical picture of education—a professor teaches a student—and although I named the presence of others, I gave the impression that they were bystanders.

But the best “lectures” that I have ever delivered were not me at a lectern and students voicing their assent to my brilliant ideas; they hardly qualify as lectures at all. On those days the students internalised the material. They engaged together—each from their own perspectives—and they participated in a dialogue. On those days, I simply facilitated a conversation, offering clarifications and raising questions when necessary. At the risk of belabouring my musical metaphors, on those days, I sang the melody, and my students joined me in rich harmonies. Their voices add fullness and diversity.

Even so, some educational environments do not always celebrate and facilitate the diversity of their students. They value assimilation—catechesis is both cultural and doctrinal. These environments do not welcome students



to share who they are within the classroom and thus allow meaningful peer to peer learning. In those environments, peers reinforce the professor's position because it is the only one that is valid.

Theological education provides access to formational experiences.

No matter how rich one's classroom experience may be, theological education demands other opportunities for learning and spiritual formation. Many of these experiences draw upon the presence of good mentors and peers, but they centre spiritual growth rather than intellectual growth.

For the new information that students receive to sink deep within their bones, they must see it in action. In chapel, they hear preaching that reflects the goodness of God in a particular text in Scripture. This brings together their homiletics, biblical studies, and systematic theology lectures, and more importantly, it nourishes their souls. In their dining hall, they eat with students from other backgrounds; they break bread and pray for one another. They model charity, and they build relationships that will hold them together during in-class disagreements. Similarly, in the hallways, students hear professors laughing with colleagues and other students, and they see them with their children and spouses. In some environments, faculty, staff, and students are neighbours. Together they serve in local government and provide for the marginalised. Through this, they attest to God's redemptive work in the world.

These experiences also bear witness to the gifts God has bestowed to those in our midst. Hearing a peer singing or preaching or praying allows us to give thanks for how they have been equipped by God. Likewise, standing alongside those gifted in hospitality and exhortation presses us to develop those gifts in ourselves.

But some theological programs have little to offer students outside the classroom. Students grow in knowledge and understanding of a certain kind, but their education is not embodied. The ties between the classroom and the church remain invisible.

When these benefits—good encounters with mentors and peers as well as other shared experiences—are not present, the difference between formal and informal theological education is diminished because they press us beyond our natural associations. In other words, they give us access to new things.

The breadth of this may vary depending on where our theological education takes place, but even in small

denominational training schools, you should expect to encounter those whom you would not meet otherwise—people with knowledge of other theological traditions, regions, cultural backgrounds, and life experiences.

But the limitations in certain styles and venues of theological education require students to choose their environments carefully. Practical considerations, such as degree length and cost, cannot—and should not—be eliminated. But formal theological education is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that will lay the foundation for decades of ministry. In some cases, waiting a year or two (or five) might provide additional financial stability or an opportunity to relocate for residential education. These investments truly are not possible for everyone, but they should be considered by all desiring to pursue ministry.

At its best, formal theological education provides additional categories and language for our informal theological education. Our mentors and friends help us to put language to what we have observed in the world. And we worship together.

Madison N. Pierce (PhD, Durham University) is Associate Professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary (Holland, MI, USA). She also is New Testament Editor at Reviews of Biblical and Early Christian Studies and a co-host of The Two Cities podcast. Her research interests are the Epistle to the Hebrews and early Christian interpretation.





Theological Education: Facing the Unknown

DR SYDNEY TOOTH
OAK HILL, LONDON

One day in class a student asked me a question. While that's standard in any class, this time I wrestled internally with how to reply. I didn't know the answer, but should I admit that? I'm the lecturer after all. I should know these things. And I'm a woman in an overwhelmingly male profession with overwhelmingly male students. If I admit I don't know, would that undercut my credibility? Would that justify those who think I shouldn't be doing this? Should I try and just make something up, see if anyone calls my bluff? After a deep breath, quelling the internal monologue, I simply replied, "I'm sorry. I don't know, but I'll see what I can find and come back to you."

I didn't think much of this exchange (other than fighting my own imposter syndrome) until later a student approached me to thank me for being so honest. This student then shared that thought they shouldn't ever say "I don't know" as someone training for ministry as they had never seen someone in church leadership do so. They said seeing someone in my position admit a lack of knowledge was surprising and freeing for them. That experience shocked and saddened me at the time, but I've now seen this play out repeatedly among my students. Another time, a student told me they were afraid to test out new ideas or initiatives because there was "the way" things "should" be done and because they weren't given any permission to try and fail; it had to be a success if they were going to try anything new.

These two interactions highlight what I think are some fundamental problems that theological educators should be pushing back against. One problem I see in the current landscape is a desire to look impressive or to come across as competent and effective in ministry. This plays out in multiple ways, such as popular Christian figures claiming academic credentials they do not actually have or a desire to recruit and influence "the best and brightest." At the same time, in many of these circles there has been an alarmingly consistent unwillingness to admit when a mistake has been made or to clearly name harm that has been done. We also see this occur where leaders neglect the perspective of those under their care, assuming that they have the "correct understanding" of things.



Dr Sydney Tooth

pictured

I think those of us involved in Christian ministry and education are often afraid to admit our limitations and weaknesses. One of the most helpful books I've read lately is Kelly Kapic's *You're Only Human*. Kapic focuses on the very human quality of finitude and how our nature as limited beings is not a curse or something to be overcome but is instead a gift from God, the only one who is infinite and unlimited. Living out our finitude requires humility—an understanding that we cannot possibly do it all, for we were not designed to do so. It also requires patience and discipline to regard our limits as blessings rather than hindrances and to not be afraid of revealing those limitations to others.

There are challenges here for theological educators and for church leaders alike. Too often theological education can serve to puff up rather than humble. We've all encountered the fresh student who overfills their sermon with quotes from Calvin or appeals to "the original language" while communicating little of real pastoral value. One possible antidote to this problem could be encouraging a culture of theological educators who regularly admit their own shortcomings and limitations, thus forming the same practices in their students. I would love to see a greater emphasis across the theological education sector of training students to try new things, with wisdom, and to not be ashamed of failure. I would also love to see more church leaders give themselves and those under their care permission to show weakness.

To enact this vision, we need to ask: What's the goal of theological education? Perhaps the obvious answer is to be equipped for ministry. There is something utilitarian in this answer, though, as if the only benefit of education is to walk away with a set of strategies and specialist



knowledge that can be directly applied. At times, however, theological education does not look particularly useful. “How will this help me practically in my ministry?” is a fair enough question, but it reveals that we have failed in communicating the real goal of education. Ask most theological educators what they want for their students and I guarantee you’ll hear something along the lines of wanting students to be personally transformed through their time at theological college. Truly valuable theological education grows students’ characters even more than their knowledge. While there are of course skills and information that are important for one’s ministry training, what is most important is letting that knowledge form one’s habits, thoughts, responses, and interactions.

Theological education can be particularly suited to exposing limitations as students grapple with deep and complex theology, battle with the new grammar of ancient languages, and are stretched by pressured deadlines and demanding assessments. The formative impact of intentionally helping students to seriously consider and value their finitude would be significant. It would force one to grow in patience, recognising that learning is a life-long process and that it’s impossible to have all the answers or to always do the right thing. It would encourage leaders to actively seek out other perspectives and to listen well to those under their care. And, hopefully, it would open the door to a greater willingness to

acknowledge our mistakes. The simple sentence, “I was wrong” can make a significant difference in the culture of a church or institution. A setting where mistakes are accepted, real apologies are quickly and sincerely offered, and clear repentance and change is at work is a place that models the power of the gospel.

For myself, I hope among everything important and helpful my students learn they learn how to say, “I don’t know.” I hope they are bold enough to acknowledge, even value, their limits and to model that for their congregants. I hope they are endlessly curious about God and about people, wanting to grow in knowledge in order to love better. I hope when they get something wrong they are clear and honest in their apologies and take active steps to right the wrong. I hope they can bear cheerfully with others’ limits and not expect more of people than is reasonable. Like what is said of Abraham in Hebrews 11:8, I hope they might be courageous enough to obey and go, even when they don’t know exactly where they’re going or how things will turn out.

***Sydney Tooth** (PhD, University of Edinburgh) is Lecturer in New Testament and Greek at Oak Hill College in London, UK. Her research interests lie in the Pauline Epistles, especially Thessalonians, and Christian eschatology. She is a co-host on the Two Cities Podcast*





The Vitality of Good Theological Education

REV PROF DOROTHY LEE
TRINITY COLLEGE, MELBOURNE

A strong and solid theological education for clergy is vital for the life of the church.

There are those, I know, who would disagree, arguing that skills in preaching, leading liturgy, administering the sacraments and engaging in pastoral care is all that's required, without adding all that "irrelevant academic stuff." These skills can be gained in all kinds of ways, surely, that don't require the cost and sacrifice of three-plus years of academic study.

There is more than one response to this argument. In the first place, the training of minds — the academic side — is not an optional extra. Jesus calls us to love God with our whole being, including our minds (Mk 12:29). Our minds need to be trained, focussed, shaped. Anti-intellectualism is dangerous and leads to people who don't think issues through but who are led by emotions, emotions they don't necessarily understand. Theological education is not attempting to turn students into formal academics. Instead, it's opening up worlds that will engage, shape and broaden the mind — and also, therefore, the heart.

Secondly, the purpose of theological education is not primarily to teach skills. Its aim is the formation, and even transformation, of those who believe they have a vocation to holy orders, and other ministries. This formation has a number of crucial elements. It means being formed into a kind of leadership that is profoundly theological and spiritual which begins with the study of the Scriptures. Understanding the Bible is not simply a question of my response to individual passages and how they connect to my life. It's far bigger than that.

The study of Scripture involves learning at least one biblical language — in most cases, this will be Greek but Hebrew is also encouraged — so that the sacred text can be read in the original languages, with awareness that every translation has its own bias. It means studying the social and religious contexts out of which the texts arise and which enable us to discern meaning for our very different contexts. It involves exploring the different genres of literature that the Bible contains (on a wide spectrum) and the literary ways in which the story or the discourse or the poetry is told, to tell the Bible story in



Rev Prof Dorothy Lee

pictured

our own diverse environments. It includes developing an awareness of the diversity of Scripture within its overarching unity, enabling it to speak to many different settings and situations today.

Equally important is knowing the development of theology in the historical life and experience of the church. Understanding the ecumenical creeds, for example, enables us to grasp the centrality of affirming God as holy Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — and also Christ as both divine and human. Learning the history of these debates in those crucial early centuries, when the church was so often under persecution, is critical for our grasp of the theology. Learning about the Reformations of the sixteenth century helps us to grasp the centrality of grace within the life.

One of the things church history teaches us is how different contexts, cultures and genders bring their own insights to bear on studying Scripture. Our Western context has often ignored the Eastern church which is every bit as old and revered as ours. We've also tended to assume whiteness as the norm, when in fact Christians across Africa and Asia vastly outnumber us. We've assumed maleness to be another norm, setting aside the insights that women bring to theology and spirituality. Theological education expands our horizons beyond the narrow bounds of Western white male structures and symbolism.

On a somewhat more practical level, theological education gives insight into spirituality, sociology, psychology, missiology and pastoral care. Students need to learn how society functions and how the human mind and emotions work. Theological education unveils the rich veins of Christian spirituality down through the ages. It teaches how mission works — how it has sometimes failed in the



past by being associated with colonialism, and how it needs to become contextualised and focussed not only on individual conversion but also on social transformation and care for our endangered environment. It teaches the elements of pastoral care and the theology which should undergird it.

Yes, there are indeed skills to be learned in the process of theological education. But these skills are the outward manifestation of a profound sense of theology, an awareness of where the evangelical centre of our faith lies. That centre is a broad place that incorporates not just the individual but also the community and indeed the whole creation.

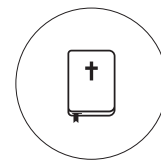
In one sense, such learning is a life-long process and not just for the formal years of theological education. Our clergy and ministers need to be aware of the need to continue their own education beyond graduation and ordination. They need to be learners all their lives. The word ‘disciple’ means a student and we never move beyond that role as followers of Jesus Christ. We need always to be open to learn, to discover new ways of understanding the faith, new insights from the Scriptures, new abilities to comprehend the world we live in. The model of Mary of Bethany sitting at the feet of Jesus to learn from him, above all other duties, is a wonderful picture of where the centre lies in discipleship and ministry (Lk 10:38-42).

It's true that life is much more complex now and the old model of ordinands living together for three or four years while they study and pray is no longer viable. The church can't afford it and ordinands are often married with children and don't have the same freedoms. We need to think in new and imaginative ways about how that formation can happen, without forsaking academic and theological rigour, and without abandoning the focus on learning together in community.

However we do it, in what shape or form for the future, theological education will remain essential for the vigour and well-being of the church in its God-given tasks of worship and mission.

***Dorothy Lee** is Stewart Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity College Theological School (Melbourne) with a particular interest in the narrative and structure of the Gospels—especially the Gospel of John—and women's ministry in the New Testament.*





Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla: Nurturing the Faith through Teaching

REV DR CHRISTOPHER A PORTER
TRINITY COLLEGE, MELBOURNE

In the vibrant narrative of early Christian communities found in the book of Acts, Luke introduces us to Apollos in Acts 18:24-26, an evidently eloquent and fervent disciple whose story gives us some insight into education and mentoring in the early church. Apollos, hailing from Alexandria, enters Ephesus, equipped with a fervent spirit and a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. However, Luke draws out a crucial revelation for us: “he knew only the baptism of John.” Despite his evident zeal and scriptural competence, Apollos stands at the threshold of deeper understanding, highlighting the significance of ongoing theological education and the community of faith.

This is particularly shown in the teaching intervention orchestrated by Aquila and Priscilla, a couple known for tent making ministry and association with the Apostle Paul. Recognising what was lacking in Apollos' knowledge, they take him aside and “explain to him the way of God more accurately.” Aquila and Priscilla here exemplify the vital role of teaching, and spiritual mentoring, within the Christian community. Their act of taking Apollos aside signifies a deliberate and personal investment in his theological education underscoring that knowledge—even substantial knowledge—can benefit from the guidance of seasoned mentors.

We can also see here the communal nature of theological education. The act of taking Apollos aside implies an intimate, one-on-one setting where the complexities of faith are unpacked through dialogue, explanation, and patient instruction, emphasising the importance of personal engagement in the process of nurturing theological understanding. But from our knowledge of ancient education the home environment is also strongly communal, and if we have any doubt we see in verse 27 that the “brothers and sisters encouraged [Apollos] and wrote to the disciples [in Achaia]” to commend him. Indeed, Apollos goes on to Corinth where Paul describes him as nurturing (watering) the faith of the church (1 Cor 3:6).

This relationship of learner and teacher deepens the understanding of the church, and challenges the common perception that teaching is a one-sided endeavour of “chalk and talk.”

In reflecting on this early Christian community, we should be prompted to evaluate our own roles in the teaching and learning dynamics within our churches and communities. Do we actively seek opportunities to teach and be taught? Are we fostering an environment where theological study and instruction is approached with humility and a desire for mutual growth?

The narrative of Apollos' encounter with Aquila and Priscilla in Acts still serves as a pattern for believers today—a call to engage in intentional, personal teaching that nurtures the growth of theological understanding and relationship. Luke encourages us to view teaching as a collaborative and transformative act, fostering a community where knowledge is shared, humility is cultivated, and the journey of faith is enriched through intentional, personalised instruction.

Chris Porter (*PhD, Ridley College*) is the Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at Trinity College Theological School (Melbourne). His research interests are in the social-identities of the early church, the sociology of schism, the Gospel of John, and is currently writing a commentary on Acts. He serves on several Christian for-purpose boards, and is a regular co-host on the *Two Cities Podcast*.



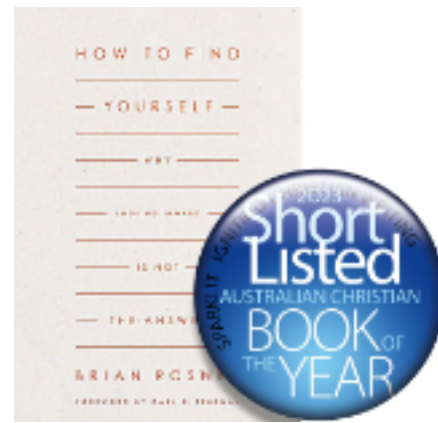
How to Find Yourself: Why looking inwards is not the answer

REV DR BRIAN S. ROSNER
Crossway, 2022
REVIEWED BY KAREN HALE

In his previous book *Known by God A biblical theology of personal identity* (2017) Brian Rosner (Principal, Ridley College) outlines a compelling argument for our identity being directly linked to being known by God. This latest book is a more accessible account exploring our identity and the question 'Who am I? In the west the answer to this question is solved by looking inward. Rosner critiques this way of working out our identity and explores the many short comings of this view. He then seeks to provide an alternative of seeing our identity not primarily from within but by looking upwards to God. This view of looking inward is called expressive individualism. It stresses that if you want to know yourself and be happy then you need to look inward. Personal freedom is prized above all else and we should celebrate everyone's quest for self-expression. The positives of this view are briefly outlined by Rosner before addressing a thoughtful critique.

The question of identity is not new but the markers that we use to express our identity have changed significantly over the last 50 years. Today we use fewer identity markers to describe who we are. Rosner challenges us to ask 5 important questions of expressive individualism. Does it help us deal with suffering, our pride, the poor and weak, injustice and our happiness. Rosner argues that this way of finding our identity is both fragile and faulty.

By looking at some ancient Biblical texts Brian Rosner explores how we have seen the fragility and faults of humans in seeking to look within to define their identity. In the story of Adam and Eve we find humans thinking they can work out their own path and that they know best. This has terrible consequences, and it is only in looking at Jesus that we finally see a human who is tempted to trust themselves and yet trusts God. Even though today we are told to look inward, Rosner rightly identifies that this is not the full view. We have never been more obsessed with looking around us. Through social media, in particular, we compare and contrast ourselves to everyone else. Rosner suggests that the missing piece we are yearning for is looking upwards. True identity is beyond us. He suggests that we are a social story telling beings that want to worship. From when we are babies to the end of life we live in society and are shaped by all the relationships that we have. 'To



know yourself you need to be known. Known by others but more importantly known by God.

Rosner contends that today the narrative that we inhabit is secular materialism. Historically this has come from the enlightenment, a story of progress, freedom from the dark past. We then had the sexual revolution, a story of freedom for pleasure. Now we see the story of consumerism, we are what we buy. This seems to tap into financial security and enjoyment. All these stories have failed us, as they do not take seriously the impact of personal freedoms nor the capacity of humans to do harm. There has been some acknowledgement of these pitfalls and so another story has emerged that highlights social justice. This is a strong voice at present. It is a very black and white view of social justice and fails to take into account the complexity of many issues.

In contrast to secular materialism Brian Rosner offers a positive way forward. We are part of a bigger story, God's story, which is particularly seen in Jesus' story. He then asks the same questions of this view. Can this help us with suffering, our pride, the poor and weak, injustice and happiness. We don't just believe God's story we inhabit this story.

The final part of the book looks at how to live within this story. It is a paradox that you are told to lose yourself to be able to find yourself. We don't look in, but to Christ to truly find ourselves. We are encouraged to trust in Jesus and to immerse ourselves in his story, a story with love at the centre.

I highly commend this book as it seeks to help us engage with the complex issue of our identity. In a world that currently has fewer identity markers and yet espouses greater freedom that does not seem to deliver. Identity crisis seems to be occurring at every age today from children to the elderly. The story we have been sold of expressive individualism doesn't seem to be delivering on the freedoms it seems to promise. Instead, people are more confused than ever. Brian Rosner provides a compelling case for seeing our identity within God's story. The story of the good news of Jesus. It is a bigger story beyond ourselves but one in which we get to live. We are part of this narrative, and it is a story that is rooted in love. To be truly known and loved by God gives us an identity that is able to withstand the complexities of life.

Karen Hale is Teacher of Religious Education and Science at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School.

Raising Tech-Healthy Humans

DANIEL SIH

Publish Central, 2023

REVIEWED BY MARK SIMON

Daniel Sih's book for parents on shaping the technology habits of their children is just what it claims to be – helpful guidance for parents grappling with technology usage in the modern world. Every parent I know grapples with this area. Countless studies and articles highlight the potential dangers of excessive technology use by children (and adults), and Sih includes brief highlights of some potential harms. So the need for guidance in this area is clear, and Sih serves up a range of practical strategies underpinned by a foundational principle: parenting is about raising adults, not children. Therefore, “the role of a parent is to love, mentor and equip their children with the physical, emotional and psychological experiences they need to become adults.” (p.7) The strategies, perspectives and reflection questions he presents all contribute to a parent's ability to raise tech-healthy adults, not just to minimise arguments about screen time.

A brief chapter on brain development and function highlights the reasons children so easily get addicted to technology (it engages the ‘downstairs brain’ – impulsive, emotional, fight/flight responses), and introduces a distinction between passive and interactive media. Passive media (such as TV and movies) has been around for decades, but more recently the proliferation of interactive media (such as video gaming and social media) encourages users to ‘lean-forward’ to engage with it, and overstimulates the downstairs brain, making it the more problematic form of technology for healthy brain development.

The core of the book is a framework based on the acronym ‘Starter’. Start with self; Take it slowly; Age-appropriateness; Regular talk; Tech-healthy rhythms; Encourage adventures; Rely on others. For each of these principles, Sih combines research and insights with practical suggestions. The book is a short and easy read – perfect for time-poor, technology-saturated parents. It includes an appendix ‘100 Fun Non-Screen Activities to do with Kids’ – which reminds us all that the best things in life are free (teddy bear picnics, dress-ups, board games, exercising together, music, water fights...)

One interesting feature of the book as a short-listed finalist in the Australian Christian Book of the Year Awards is that it doesn't present any explicitly Christian perspectives on technology usage in the family. There are



plenty of implicit priorities that Christian families would affirm (such as mentoring, and mutual accountability), but the book got me wondering whether parenting in a Christian context adds any distinctive dynamics or goals into the mix.

The book is also best suited to parents of younger children and pre-teens, since it acknowledges the capacity to impact or radically change course with teenagers who have already become set in unhealthy habits requires a different approach. Despite these minor quibbles, there is much benefit to be gained by readers of Sih's book (not just parents, but anyone who uses technology).

Rev Dr Mark Simon is Lecturer in New Testament and Research Associate at Ridley College, and minister of St Luke's Vermont.



Religious Freedom in a Secular Age

REV DR MICHAEL F. BIRD

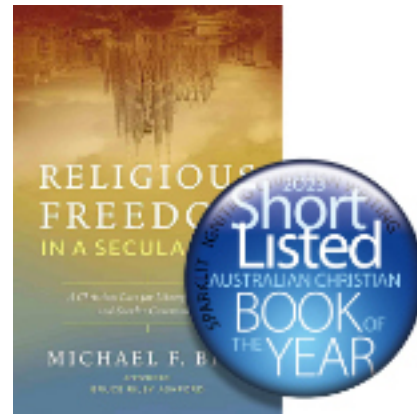
Zondervan, 2022

REVIEWED BY BP MICHAEL STEAD

Religious Freedom has become a lightning rod of controversy in many Western societies, over whether and how religious freedom needs to be limited in order to protect the rights and freedoms of others, especially the LGBTQI+ community. Bird's book *Religious Freedom in a Secular Age* was written largely between 2016 and 2020, at a time when both Australia and the wider world were increasingly embroiled in political conflicts about this, arising from the intersections of religion, government, the public square and personal belief. Bird proposes a way forward that challenges those on the political left who are antagonistic to religion freedom, and those on the political right who seek to weaponise it.

Chapters one and two seek to give a positive argument for secularism, and to distinguish this from militant secularism. Bird argues that secularism is a "post-Christendom political settlement concerned with negotiating space for religious beliefs, diverse beliefs and unbelief in a society no longer dominated by a single homogeneous religious worldview?" (15). Secularism arose out of both the Reformation and the Enlightenment, emerging as the best way to ensure religious freedom in nation states made up of diverse religious adherents living in proximity to each other, set within the framework of fresh philosophies of political rights and freedoms. Bird argues that "secularism with the separation of church and state is a genuinely noble way to carry Christianity forward in a free, democratic and pluralistic environment" (54). Bird contrasts this to militant secularism, which seeks to both to remove religion from the public square and to subject religions to regulation by the state. Secularism is based on state neutrality to religion; militant secularism seeks to neutralise religion

Chapters three, four and five collectively make a positive case for religious freedom. Bird argues that Christians should not pursue a civil religion (such as Christian Nationalism) nor should they accept the imposition of a civic totalism driven by progressive authoritarianism, but instead pursue a confident pluralism. Confident pluralism is Bird's articulation of classic liberal pluralism, in which individuals and groups have liberty to live and act in according with their own values, and the state should only limit this liberty where necessary to protect the freedoms and rights of others. Freedom of religion is



critical in this, because it is the litmus test of overall freedom in society and overall human rights. Bird argues that "the society that ensures the free exercise of religion is more likely to uphold the rights of those who are vulnerable, marginalised, and despised for being 'other'" (114).

Chapter six and seven propose a strategy for maintaining a Christian witness in a post-Christian society. Bird briefly canvasses other possible responses (political theocracy, living as "Christians in exile", the "Benedict Option" and "faithful presence"), before articulating his own proposal, "the Thessalonian Strategy". Bird argues that, like the church in Thessalonica described in Acts 17, we need to turn the world upside down by a counter-cultural living out of the gospel, while holding out a more compelling worldview that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord. As applied to our modern secular context, "the Thessalonian strategy is a two-pronged approach. First, positively, we must champion confident pluralism as a sociopolitical philosophy, demonstrate community in action, love our neighbours, and live in such a way that those who hate us cannot give a reason for their hatred. Second, negatively, we must challenge the new legal structures being erected around us, expose the hypocrisies and prejudices of those who claim to be committed to tolerance, confront incursions into religious liberty, and disrupt the secular narrative that religion is bad for social fabric." (131) We should work together in the public square with Christians across the denominational spectrum, and with other faith groups as well. We need to be apologists who defend not only our own beliefs but also the freedom of all faiths by articulating the case for a confident pluralism and advocating for a fair secularism.

This book is a very helpful and eminently readable account of the basis of, and argument for, religious freedom in secular liberal democracies. It is not, and does not seek to be, a work of political theology. Bird's articulation of the "Thessalonian Strategy" is not the only possible way that Christians could seek to apply biblical principles to respond in the modern secular age, but in my view Bird's proposal is a good option for our current context. I commend it warmly.

Bishop Dr Michael Stead is the Anglican Bishop of South Sydney and Chair of Freedom for Faith.

Behind the Tears: Understanding, Surviving and Growing from Suffering

DR BRUCE ROBINSON

MACSIS Publishing, 2023

REVIEWED BY MICHELLE MONRO

“Behind the tears” is a book for those who are suffering, have suffered and are caring for those who suffer... in other words, for all of us.

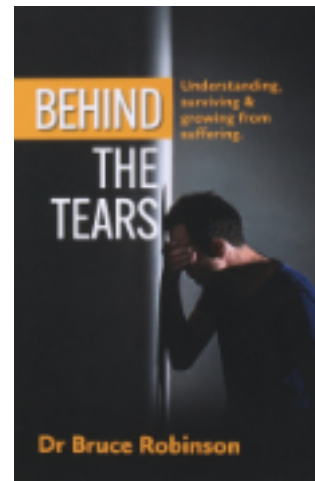
If the reader is looking for a rich theological exploration of theodicy; or a radically transformative and perfectly argued perspective on godly suffering, this book should not be your first port of call. Dr Bruce Robinson is a medical doctor, not a theologian, and he readily admits that there is a wealth of other resources that address the question of suffering from an academic viewpoint.

Yet this is where the book’s value is to be found. Not only has the author spent many years journeying professionally beside those who suffer, Dr Robinson has personally experienced pain and loss on many different levels. The breadth and depth of his experience enable Dr Robinson to write on the topic of suffering with compassionate clarity.

Drawing on his own experiences and those of others whom he has helped, Dr Robinson is perfectly placed to speak with wisdom, gentleness, compassion and depth of understanding on the issues presented to everyday believers as we experience suffering in its many forms.

Some of the strategies proposed in the book can seem simplistic; at times the author’s approach to scripture is somewhat unsophisticated... One needs to be reminded that this is an intensely personal book: the sharing of the author’s own heart. And here is the shortfall and the promise of this work – Dr Robinson writes as one who understands suffering and who longs for others to be enabled to wrestle, to understand, to persevere through, to be literally en-courage-d as they endure, and to come through suffering with a greater love for God and for others; even as he has done himself.

With this compassionate approach front and centre, the book is designed such that it can easily be read in brief snippets; scanning through so as to find what suits the particular situation someone is inquiring about. Short chapters with many headings and different styles of font easily draw the eye.



This can be beneficial or problematic: reading the book in one sitting can be frustrating, as your eye and mind rarely get a chance to settle in, follow an argument deeply or get into a flow. However, for those who are in the midst of a struggle, the work is perfectly designed for dipping in and out as you have capacity or need... Need to work out how to handle a new diagnosis? Need to know how to talk to your friends about what you need? Need to understand why you feel anger? You can easily scan through this book to find the sections that will help in the midst of your pain.

As someone who has suffered in a variety of ways - personal chronic illness, death of loved ones and caring for ageing parents with debilitating mental illness – I have resonated with many of the topics in this helpful book. Yet there are many other aspects of suffering which I have not personally endured, which are also helpfully addressed in practical ways. I imagine myself pulling this book off the shelf often when an issue of suffering arises in my own life or in the lives of those around me.

Michelle Monro is the Pastoral Minister at St Mark’s Anglican Church, Camberwell, Victoria.





The Future is Bivocational

ANDREW HAMILTON

Arkhouse Press 2022

REVIEWED BY REV ANGUS MONRO

Andrew Hamilton wants to goad, encourage and guide pastors and church-planters to broaden their horizons beyond the standard “professional minister” model, and is convinced that bivocationality needs to become normal. So, this book – shortlisted for SparkLit’s 2023 Christian Book of the Year - is designed for you if you are:

- considering a future in pastoral ministry or church-planting
- struggling to connect meaningfully with your flock’s everyday experiences
- wanting to radically deepen your community engagement
- looking for a way to circumvent that inevitable conversation-stopper (“I’m a minister”)
- desiring your members to take more ministry responsibility
- operating bivocationally already but struggling to make it work
- or in a financially struggling parish.

And on that last point, this might be just the book for churchwardens, too.

Hamilton’s background emerges from the stories scattered through this book. In the 1970s, the West Australian Baptist church sent ‘worker pastors’ – including the author’s future in-laws – to the far North West of the state to work full-time secularly while endeavouring to plant churches after-hours. Fast forward, and Hamilton, lacking a full-time role during this first two decades of Baptist ministry, supplemented his church income with side jobs to which he frankly admits he attached little meaning. His bivocational awakening occurred when he decided to start his own home irrigation installation business and through this found himself getting to know his community’s people, and even praying for and inviting them to church. Since then he has embraced and developed this model, including blogging, mentoring and surveying likeminded people.

The book is very readable with plenty of stories, both the author’s own and others’. Hamilton’s style has this frustrating feature, though: he frequently starts a chapter or section on a weak theological footing (I think his intent is to start where the reader might be!). Hang in there, though – he will work his way to firmer ground. His theology of work itself is a case in point: the first four chapters will give the reader the impression that he views work in utilitarian or evangelistic terms; then work



emerges as being of creational value and a means of worship.

This is a very practical book. After working to convince us that bivocationality needs to be a staple of neighbourhood ministry, Hamilton surveys a number of essential topics. Vocation, calling and identity are revisited. Challenges, pitfalls and complexities of the bivocational lifestyle are discussed. He puts on his career counsellor’s hat and suggests eight options for finding work. The spiritual life and leadership of the bivocational minister receive some centring advice. Bivocationality requires building a ministry team and adjusting one’s self-expectations, to which a chapter is devoted.

If we were to embrace this within Anglicanism, we may need to revisit the assumption of full-timeness at a structural level. For example, in Melbourne the number of synod representatives of a parish is linked to the number of full-time ministers in the parish. But what if a parish has four 50/50 bivocational ministers? At the same time, I found myself wondering as I read: Hamilton’s model is one solution; could reviving Anglicanism’s historical priest (church gathered) / deacon (church scattered) distinction also be a solution, or piece thereof? I am referring here to the distinctive deacon as one dedicated to supporting laypeople where they are in the community. This has been my own part-time ministry alongside my secular business analyst role: encouraging and enabling believers at their frontlines to stand firmer in their faith, conducting in-house worship services and training in work-as-ministry and in witness.

Our culture is no longer all that interested in hearing the voice of professional church ministers, so Hamilton’s proposal merits every minister’s serious consideration.

Angus Monro BE, BSc, MDiv is a distinctive deacon in the Diocese of Melbourne, ministering as a business analyst in an Australian multinational bank while pastoring its global christian community and chairing its multi-faith umbrella. He is married to Michelle, and together they worship and serve at St Mark’s, Camberwell.

NEAC 2024

April 30 – May 2

National Evangelical Anglican Conference

RECHARGE. REFRESH. RENEW.

FUTURE OF EVANGELICAL ANGLICANISM

Great ministry streams on offer.

More details at neac.org.au

Register NOW...



Charlie Skrine
Rector, All Souls Langham Place



Jeri Jones Sparks
Asst, St James Croydon



Valerie Ling
Clinical Psychologist



Adam Lowe
Rector, St Bart's Toowoomba



Kanishka Raffel
Archbishop of Sydney

ST BARNABAS BROADWAY SYDNEY

\$240 Super early bird until Dec 1
Student/concession and
group pricing available



If undeliverable, return to:
EFAC Australia
20 Gordon St
Fairfield, VIC 3078

**PRINT
POST**
100001974

**POSTAGE
PAID**
AUSTRALIA

essentials
