

We cannot help but speak



But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Acts 4:19-20



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For we cannot but speak...



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One of my favourite parts of the Bible is Acts chapter 4. There are many reasons to love this chapter of God's word. For one, seeing the boldness of Peter and John is such a contrast to the fear they showed during Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Then there is the great declaration by Peter in verse 12 regarding Jesus's name—

"there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

But I'm always struck most by what Peter and John say in verses 19 and 20. Having been warned and charged by the council *not* to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, Peter and John answer,

"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

I love this because it's just so 'right' and 'true'! *If* Jesus is in fact the Messiah and died and rose again. *If* Peter and John have seen it with their very own eyes. *If* Jesus is the name by which we must be saved, then how could Peter and John *not* speak of what they have seen and heard! This is *not* the sort of news that one keeps to oneself—it's news that must be spoken about. However, this is where the challenge comes for me personally. Am I someone who cannot but speak of what I've heard and know about Jesus?

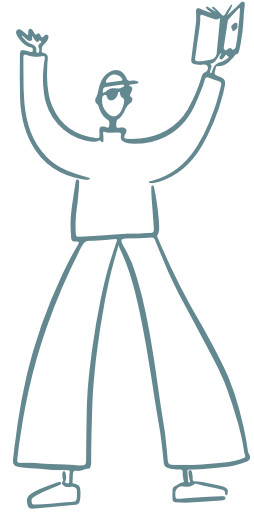
The topic of 'Evangelism' for our ACR Easter Journal is not the most creative of topics to choose! And yet, it is a topic that we must continue to talk about and challenge ourselves in constantly. The modern Christian life is immersed in the busyness of the modern world,

and when things are busy and the task list is endless, one of the first things to drop off is our efforts to share Jesus with others. A brother said to me recently, "Sydney Anglicans used to be known as the 'evangelism guys'. They were the radicals who would not shut-up about Jesus. But I'm not sure that rings true anymore." I think there is some truth to that comment. Have we lost our 'mission' heart? Sydney Anglicans at present are not known as the 'mission guys'. Now, you might not agree with that comment (and if you don't, I'd love you to interact with us and tell us why)! Nevertheless, the ACR Editorial Panel thought we would make this Easter Journal about 'Evangelism'. What better time than Easter to encourage us all to be those who cannot but speak about Jesus as we remember his death and resurrection?

What follows in this issue of the ACR Journal is a variety of pieces written to stimulate our thinking and actions when it comes to evangelism and being on 'mission'. You won't realise this as you read, but a good number of the articles have come about through vigorous dialogue and interaction. Some from more recent months, others over the last few years. One thing we all need to do better is to learn how to argue more! Of course, argue in a manner that is gentle and kind and godly. But nevertheless, argue with our Bibles open and with our pride in check, wanting to see our God rightly worshiped and glorified.

As an example, the recent rise of the Reach Australia movement has been good for us Sydney Anglicans. Over the last few years there has been an argument put forward by the movement that questions the lack of numerical growth seen in the Sydney Anglican Diocese—an argument that says we should and can be doing better when it comes to numerical church growth and being on 'mission' as churches in our Diocese. The reality is, on the whole, those who are part of the Reach Australia movement *are* doing better and working harder when it comes to seeing numerical growth in their churches. If I was asked, "who are those known as the 'evangelism guys' at present?", I would say, "the Reach guys". There is no doubt that Reach Australia is labouring and strategising for numerical growth and putting a great amount of energy into their evangelistic efforts. I believe their efforts have been good for us Sydney Anglicans and *has* challenged us to do better when it comes to evangelism.

However, there has also been push back. There have been arguments going back the other way. I think we Sydney Anglicans have been just as good for the Reach Australia movement. Questions of theology and biblical ministry practice have been raised. Statements have been questioned and challenged (think of the many discussions around 'faithfulness vs fruitfulness' over the years, or phrases like 'a relentless pursuit for growth'). And not that they would admit it (tongue *fully* in cheek here!), but I've seen the ministry practice and convictions of both 'Reach guys' and 'Sydney guys' change and sharpen in light of good and godly argumentation. This is a good thing! At the end of the day we are neither 'Sydney guys' nor 'Reach guys' but brothers and sisters in Christ who desire the glory of our great God.



This is all to say, do take the time to understand the issues raised and to hear the various arguments put forth. If we want to see our God glorified, then we must make our evangelism an absolute priority, but we must also do so in a way that is theologically considered. And as always, nothing that follows claims to be the final word on the matter. Rather, the dialogue must continue!

Most importantly, as you read, we hope you are reminded that Jesus is Messiah and Lord, and there is no other name by which we must be saved. Let us therefore follow the lead of the Apostles and be those who cannot help but speak of Christ.

Happy Easter!

Mike Leite, Editorial director

(On behalf of the Editorial Panel: Meagan Bartlett, Matt Capel, Renee Capel, Andrew Leslie, Jocelyn Loane, Stephen Tong, Bronwyn Windsor, Lionel Windsor) **ACR**



Gospel seriously:

The dangerous necessity of goal-driven ministry



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What are you aiming for in your ministry? How are you planning to reach these goals? What do you have to change to make it happen? Not just in your rhetoric, but in your action? Not just in your grand visions, but in your daily routines? What good but secondary things will you abandon for those goals? Will you be serious about it? Systematic? Sacrificial? Courageous? What skills do you need to learn to reach the goals?

This kind of thinking has gained much traction in various Christian ministry circles in Australia in recent years.¹ For want of a better term, I'll call it 'goal-driven ministry'.² It's the kind of ministry thinking that tends to borrow heavily from the worldly wisdom of things like

systems theory—inputs, processes, measurement, outputs—strategic planning, leadership, statistical analysis, quality control, business management, etc.

And I have a confession to make: I love it! I was an engineer by training and vocation. I once lived and breathed in the world of systems and control, including workplace processes

- 1 This is not entirely new, of course. Don Carson noted in the 1990s: "At the moment, books are pouring off the presses telling us how to plan for success, how 'vision' consists in clearly articulated 'ministry goals,' how the knowledge of detailed profiles of our communities constitutes the key to successful outreach... We depend on plans, programs, vision statements..." Donald A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), pp 25–26.
- 2 I've chosen this phrase in part because it echoes Rick Warren's influential "purpose driven" philosophy from the 1990s, without being identical to it (because this article isn't just about Rick Warren's views from the 1990s). See further Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

and leadership for quality. Even now, as an Anglican minister and New Testament lecturer at Moore College, I still love serious, well-organised, goal-driven planning and processes. Most of all, I love it when the goal being pursued is the one that truly matters: the goal of evangelism. It really matters that we reach our friends, neighbourhoods, cities, and nations with the saving gospel of Christ crucified and risen from the dead—Christ, who died on the cross for our sins and saves us from God’s wrath as we hear this message and trust in him.

Because this goal matters so much, I want to issue **two appeals** to anyone involved in making decisions about gospel ministry (including myself):

Appeal #1: Engage in goal-driven ministry for the sake of the gospel of Christ crucified

Appeal #2: Constantly critique your goal-driven ministry by the gospel of Christ crucified

At first glance, the two appeals seem to be directly opposed to one another. But both are vital. They’re two sides of the same coin. Both involve taking the gospel seriously. And both arise from biblical truths that can be seen especially clearly in 1 Corinthians.

If you prefer the first appeal (like me), you’ll probably be inclined to downplay the second. If you prefer the second appeal, you’ll probably be inclined to downplay the first. So, as you read this article, can I ask you to try to read against the grain of your personal inclinations? I’d love you to engage particularly carefully with the *opposite* of whatever naturally appeals to you most.

Appeal #1: Engage in goal-driven ministry for the sake of the gospel of Christ crucified

Goal-driven ministry of some form is a necessity for anyone serious about the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to engage in it, humbly and prayerfully. Why? Because it’s a logical implication of the gospel of Christ crucified. That’s because ministry isn’t simply about being theoretically correct. Ministry has a goal: the salvation of many through Christ crucified. And we need to be serious about this goal, under God. Let me show you how this works by looking at 1 Corinthians 8–10.

The Corinthian problem: Gospel theoretically (1 Corinthians 8)

In 1 Corinthians 8–10, the apostle Paul is engaging with a specific issue that affected these Christians living in an ancient pagan city: whether it’s OK to eat food sacrificed to idols. Some of the Corinthians were acting based purely on “knowledge” (Chapter 8). They only cared about the gospel *theoretically*. The gospel had taught them that there’s only one true God; therefore (logically, they reasoned), idols are irrelevant; therefore (logically, they reasoned), they were allowed to eat food sacrificed to idols.

But Paul slams them for this attitude. He doesn’t critique them for faulty *theoretical* knowledge about the gospel and the nature of idols. The problem is that they’d utterly neglected the *goal* of the gospel: the salvation of sinners through Christ crucified. They

weren't acting in love, which meant they weren't acting to build others up (8:1), which in turn meant they weren't acting for the goal of salvation for others. Instead, their eating of idol food was causing some brothers and sisters (who'd had past associations with idols) to stumble, which endangered their salvation: "And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died" (8:11).

Theoretical gospel "knowledge" is one thing, but what matters most for Paul is acting in line with the *goal* of the gospel: the salvation of sinners through the gospel of Christ crucified. This goal, says Paul, may require radical action and change of practice: "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (8:13).

Paul's salvation goal drove his ministry practice (1 Corinthians 9)

In chapter 9, Paul develops this idea further. He uses his own ministry to the Corinthians as an example (9:1–18). *Theoretically*, the gospel gave him various freedoms as a Christian and rights as a travelling apostle, including the right to material provision. But in his ministry to the Corinthians, he'd given up this right. Why? Because he cared more about the goal of the Corinthians' salvation through the gospel than his theoretical gospel-based ministry entitlements.

In 9:19–27, Paul explicitly spells out the goal-driven logic of salvation in his ministry (9:19–27):

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul is explicit and clear about his ministry goals. He desires to "win" people to salvation in Christ and so to "save" them. He repeatedly uses the goal-oriented terms "that" and "in order to" (Greek: *hina*) to describe this goal.

And this goal radically affects how Paul acts in his ministry to others. The goal causes him to adapt his habits of association and the way he relates to those he is seeking to win. In any given situation, he seriously considers what will be best for the salvation of those he is preaching to. He sacrificially and courageously changes how he relates in line with that goal. This is deeply personal for Paul. It affects every area of his life (see vv 24–27). And he calls the Corinthians to imitate him (10:23–11:1).

Plundering the Egyptians to help put goals into practice

What does this have to do with the kind of 'goal-driven ministry' I mentioned at the start

of this article? Clearly, Paul isn't talking here directly about using modern strategic planning and systems theory. But the gospel principle he lays out in this passage helps us see the value of using this kind of worldly wisdom in our ministries. Are we (and our churches as a whole) genuinely committed to the goal of the salvation of many? Are we genuinely committed to aligning our lives and ministries towards this goal? In that case, it's worth prayerfully and humbly learning from people in our world who have put significant thought and effort into working out how to turn goals into actions in our lives and our organisations.

This is often described using the phrase 'plundering the Egyptians'. In the Bible, this phrase describes how the Israelites took gold, silver, and other materials from their Egyptian captors as God rescued them from slavery (Exod 3:19–22). This gold, silver, etc., was evidently used as part of the materials to build the sanctuary for the worship of the LORD (Exod 35:1–29). Many Christian writers throughout history have used the image of 'plundering the Egyptians' as an illustration to describe the value of using worldly wisdom in the service and worship of Christ.³ If we're convinced that the goal of the salvation of many by Christ crucified should drive our lives and ministries, then we should realise that it's worth plundering the Egyptians—i.e., using worldly wisdom—to help in that task.

Appeal #2: Constantly critique your goal-driven ministry by the gospel of Christ crucified

My second appeal sounds like a direct contradiction to the first. But it's just as necessary. In fact, the more we engage in goal-driven ministry, the more necessary it is to critique ourselves for using it. That's because goal-driven ministry carries an unavoidable danger.

I'm not just talking about the obvious dangers. For example, there's the danger of unintended consequences. Because systems are complex, adopting certain processes and systems in your ministry might lead to outcomes that work against the goals you originally were aiming for. Or, there's the danger of muting the gospel. Goal-driven thinking might lead us to adopt a simplistic 'ends justifies the means' mentality, where we're subtly tempted to change our theology to try to win crowds and numbers. These are certainly dangers. But they're not what I'm talking about. There's a danger that is far deeper than these.



The more we use worldly wisdom, the more our hearts (and the hearts of those we preach to) are tempted to turn away from the gospel of Christ crucified.



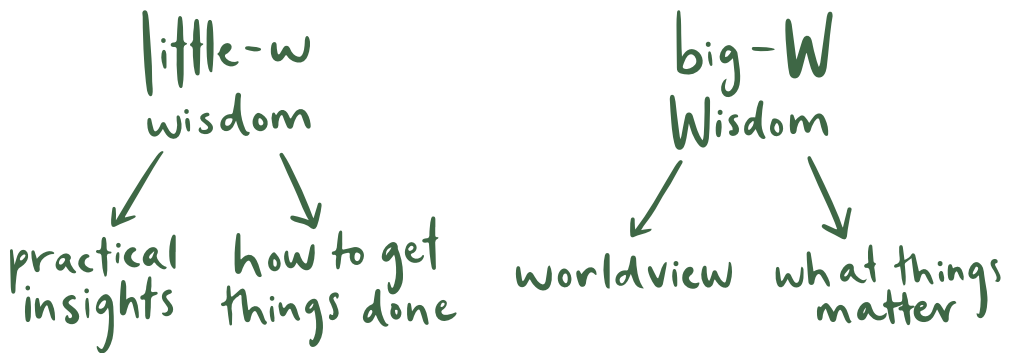
3 E.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.30; Origen, *Letter to Gregory* 2; Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 2.40. For more detail, see my *Briefing* article Lionel Windsor, "Plundering the Egyptians: The Place of Secular Wisdom in Gospel Mission and Ministry," *The Briefing*, 27 June 2012, <http://thebriefing.com.au/2012/06/plundering-the-egyptians-the-place-of-secular-wisdom-in-gospel-mission-and-ministry/>.

Think again about the gold the Israelites plundered from the Egyptians. As I've mentioned, the Israelites used some of this gold to build the sanctuary for the worship of God (Exod 35:1-29). But that's not the first thing they did with the gold, was it? First, they used the gold to make a golden calf and worshipped it as God (Exod 32:1-4). This was utterly disastrous for the entire Israelite community. It led to God's judgment and death for many (Exod 32:25-29).

This points us to the greatest hazard inherent in the task of 'plundering the Egyptians'.⁴ The gold we plunder (i.e., the worldly wisdom we adapt) is never merely a neutral building material. It always glitters and tempts us to love and treasure it in its own right. It's far too easy for worldly wisdom to become a means for false worship. The more we use worldly wisdom, the more our hearts (and the hearts of those we preach to) are tempted to turn away from the gospel of Christ crucified.⁵

Little-w wisdom and big-W Wisdom

To understand this a little more, we need to grasp what 'wisdom' is and how it works. So far in this article, I've been using the phrase 'worldly wisdom' to talk about the practical skills and general know-how we can gain from the world. But the concept of 'wisdom' is bigger than this. In the Bible, 'wisdom' has two related senses. We could label these 'little-w wisdom' and 'big-W Wisdom'. Little-w wisdom is about know-how, insights, and practical skills. Big-W Wisdom, on the other hand, is the *worldview* or *value system* that makes sense of life. Little-w wisdom teaches us how to get things done. Big-W Wisdom teaches us what things matter: what to value, love, prioritise, and choose. These two senses of 'wisdom' are distinct, yet they're intimately related. That's why the Bible uses 'wisdom' terminology to refer to both.



4 This danger was also highlighted in the early church. See, e.g., the *Apostolic Constitutions* 1.2.6.

5 For more, see Lionel Windsor, "The Perils of Plundering the Egyptians," *The Briefing*, 4 July 2012, <http://thebriefing.com.au/2012/07/the-perils-of-plundering-the-egyptians/>. This present article fulfils the promise I made back in 2012 to explore this idea further!

With that in mind, think about the ‘worldly wisdom’ of things like systems, inputs, processes, measurements, outputs, strategic planning, statistical analysis, quality control, business management, etc. In one sense, these are all just examples of little-w worldly wisdom. They’re just pragmatic concepts and skills that help us to think clearly about achieving goals. Aren’t they?

Not really. These ideas haven’t come from nowhere. They’re rooted in a particular form of big-W Wisdom: a broader philosophical movement from the last couple of centuries, grounded in Darwinian theory, called ‘Pragmatism.’⁶ Pragmatism is a philosophy, a worldview, and a value system. It claims that there’s no value in seeking ‘objective truth’. What truly matters is what *works*. Pragmatism places supreme value on our human outcomes and effectiveness. Whether we realise it or not, pragmatism has enormously influenced much of modern thinking, including sociology, psychology, management theory, organisational systems theory, etc.

Since philosophical pragmatism is part of the air we breathe in the 21st-century Western world, we usually don’t notice it. We can easily assume pragmatic thinking is just ‘common sense’. Hence the danger. Whenever we use goal-driven worldly wisdom in ministry, we’re not merely being little-p pragmatic. What we do with our hands can’t easily be quarantined from what we feel in our hearts. We’re constantly being subtly tempted to adopt the values inherent in big-P Pragmatism. This is a danger that’s beneath the surface, but for that reason threatens to go very deep: deep into our own souls, and deep into the souls of those we preach to, for generations to come.

I’m convinced that 1 Corinthians 1–4 is one of the best measures we have against the dangers inherent in worldly wisdom—including (in fact, especially) big-P Pragmatism.

1 Corinthians 1–4: A clash of big-W Wisdoms

If you approached 1 Corinthians 1–4 with a strongly goal-driven pragmatic filter, you’d probably conclude that Paul had gone completely mad. In these chapters, Paul appears to be deliberately sabotaging the entire goal-driven cause. He’s intentionally vague and annoyingly sloppy about his personal conversion statistics (1:14–16). He insists that winning and baptising converts was *not* the goal of his ministry. After all, Christ just sent him to preach the message, nothing more (1:17). In his preaching and personal relationships with the Corinthians, he deliberately avoided anything that looked like skill and human effectiveness (2:1–4). He intentionally resists human attempts to measure and evaluate ministry, insisting that faithfulness is all that matters (4:1–4). He persists in claiming that the only output worth caring about is not something humans can measure now—it’s God’s verdict on the final day (4:5; cf. 3:13). He celebrates the stupid, the frail, and the contemptible, while mocking the prudent, the potent, and the admirable (4:10).

What’s going on? It’s not that Paul was crazy, or that he merely wanted to be perverse. Instead, Paul had identified a significant and far-reaching problem among the Corinthians—a

6 See further Simon Blackburn, *Truth: A Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p 39.

problem so severe that he had to combat it right from the start of his letter in the strongest possible terms. On the surface, there was a *presenting* problem: they were factional and divisive, splitting into tribes following individual preachers and leaders (1:11–12). But this divisiveness was merely a symptom of something much deeper. The big issue was this: the Corinthians were far too enthralled by the (big-W) Wisdom of the world.

What was this Wisdom? Various scholars have identified a common first-century phenomenon that helps us to make sense of the Corinthian attitude: ‘sophistry’.⁷ Sophists were touring celebrity performers who gave skilful speeches to please crowds (generally for a price). The sophists weren’t particularly interested in the *truth* of their words; they cared most about the *effectiveness* of their words. In other words, sophists were the ancient pragmatists.⁸ They were not only *skilful* in rhetoric (little-p pragmatism); they highly *valued* rhetorical effectiveness (big-P Pragmatism). Individual sophists won praise and a following. As they preached, they implicitly taught their followers to value what they valued.

The Corinthians were evidently highly influenced by these worldly values. That’s why they’d split into tribes following various leaders. They were treating Paul, Apollos, Cephas and even Christ like celebrity speakers (1:11–12). They were buying into the big-W Wisdom of the world. That’s why Paul talks about the situation using phrases including “eloquent wisdom” (literally, “the wisdom of word”; Greek: *sophia logou*) (1:17; cf. 2:1, 4), “the wisdom of the world” (1:20; cf. 3:19), and “human wisdom” (2:13; cf. 2:5).

Paul realised that what was happening in Corinth wasn’t just a minor surface-level disturbance. It was a titanic subterranean clash of big-W Wisdoms: ours and God’s. That’s why, in 1 Corinthians 1–4, Paul repeatedly emphasises the deep opposition between human wisdom and God’s wisdom (1:17, 19, 20–27, 30; 2:1, 4–7, 13; 3:18–20). These two big-W Wisdoms are ultimately irreconcilable. Why? Because of the very nature of the gospel of Christ crucified. The gospel of Christ crucified can’t be reduced merely to a nice, easy-to-grasp message that gives us a free ticket to escape God’s judgment. It’s a one-eighty-degree revolution in the meaning of life, the universe, and everything. The cross of Christ shows us that God sees human wisdom and effectiveness as utterly mad and weak, and vice versa. The cross of Christ destroys all our human pretensions, humbles us to the depths of despair at sin and God’s judgment, and lifts us to the heights of reconciliation with God. The gospel of Christ crucified destroys human boasting in a way no human wisdom could ever fathom.

In Corinth, Paul was in a situation where his hearers’ worldview (their big-W Wisdom) prized rhetorical effectiveness and following human leaders. This was diametrically opposed to the values of the gospel of Christ crucified. So, Paul realised the gospel of Christ crucified had to determine not just the *content* of his preaching (1:22–25) but also the *method* (2:1–5):

For Christ did not send me to baptise but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Cor 1:17)

7 Carson, *Cross and Christian Ministry*, p 33.

8 For further explanation see Blackburn, *Truth*, p 39.

Paul recognised the truth that media theorist Marshall McLuhan famously coined millennia later: “the medium is the message.”⁹ The way we receive information (the medium) isn’t just a neutral channel; the channel profoundly affects how we value that information. If Paul had preached in Corinth using the powerful rhetorical methods of the world, his method would have cancelled out his message. True, he would have been *effective* in winning followers—but entirely *ineffective* where it counted most. He would have won followers who theoretically valued the gospel of Christ crucified, but, deep in their souls, really valued his human effectiveness and methods.



He would have won followers who theoretically valued the gospel of Christ crucified, but, deep in their souls, really valued his human effectiveness and methods.



Paul’s logic here has important implications for all gospel ministers. This is seen especially in chapter 3.

Watch out how we build: 1 Corinthians 3:5–15

In 1 Corinthians 3:5–15, Paul connects his discussion of cross-based ‘wisdom’ with a warning to anyone involved in gospel ministry:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled [literally, “wise”, sophos] master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care [literally, “watch out”, blepetō] how he builds upon it. (1 Cor 3:10 ESV).

The word translated here as “skilled” (ESV) is the same word root Paul has been using throughout chapters 1–4 to talk about the clash between the foolish wisdom of the world and the saving wisdom of Christ crucified. The fact that the ESV translators have chosen to use a word here that conveys little-w wisdom (“skilled”) mustn’t distract us from the fact that it’s the same word-group that Paul is using throughout these chapters to describe big-W Wisdom (25 times, both before and after this verse).¹⁰ Paul is therefore deliberately emphasising the fact that his apostolic ministry was “wise”: not meaning “skilful” by worldly standards, but *truly* wise by God’s seemingly foolish standards (cf. Isa 3:3).¹¹

In this passage, Paul describes gospel ministry using the metaphor of building using various materials: “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw” (3:12). He’s drawing on Old Testament descriptions of the building of the temple (and earlier, the tabernacle) (see, e.g.,

9 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), p 7.

10 The key Greek words are *sophia* (appearing 16 times) and *sophos* (appearing 10 times, including 3:10).

11 See also Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), p 152.

1 Chron 29:2).¹² This building work did indeed require technical skill (little-w wisdom). For example, Hiram, whom Solomon brought from Tyre to lead the building of the temple, was a “builder” who was full of “wisdom, understanding, and skill” in metalwork (1 Kgs 7:14; cf. Exod 31:1–6).¹³ Paul applies this temple-building metaphor to gospel ministry. But he does so with an unmistakable twist. Paul calls himself a “wise master builder”—not in the sense that he was humanly skilled at things like metalwork (little-w wisdom), but in the sense that he laid the foundation according to *God’s* wisdom: i.e., the gospel of Christ crucified (big-W Wisdom).



If we’ve built merely with human wisdom, it will perish... Only a structure built with the wisdom of Christ crucified will last.



And so, Paul says, all gospel ministers must “watch out” how they build on *this* foundation (3:10). In this context, Paul’s not talking about applying effective practical church growth skills and team management! That’s not a bad thing to do (as I’ve argued above), but Paul has a much more important issue to deal with here. Throughout chapters 1–4, Paul has been emphasising the *dangers* of worldly wisdom.

So, in this context, when he insists that gospel ministers must “watch out” how they build, he’s warning us that in our ministry, we must always be guided by the wisdom of Christ crucified—a wisdom that’s foolish in the world’s eyes. We must cling to this cross-based wisdom in both our content and our method. True, we’ll use all sorts of materials, some of which may even be plundered from the Egyptians. But what God truly cares about—and what will ultimately only be revealed on the last day—is not the pragmatic effectiveness of our human skills and know-how. It’s whether we’ve built with the wisdom of the cross. If we’ve built merely with human wisdom, it will perish (3:15; cf. 1:19). Only a structure built with the wisdom of Christ crucified will last (3:14; cf. 3:21–23).

This is highly relevant when it comes to gospel ministry in our modern, pragmatically-saturated world. We need to “watch out” how we build. For example, we can easily be tempted to think about the gospel of Christ crucified merely like a ‘package’ of theological content that needs to be delivered to people. So, we can think and act as if we have two separate tasks: Firstly, we need to learn the *contents* of this package (e.g., at a theological college). Secondly, we must find the most effective pragmatic *methods* to deliver the package (provided, of course, the methods don’t actually contradict the theology).

Imagine if Paul had thought this way in Corinth. He probably would have decided to borrow the rhetorical skill of the sophistic preachers to deliver his gospel package. After all, Paul’s goal was to win as many Corinthians as possible for Christ, wasn’t it? And rhetorical skill wasn’t *bad*. If he’d adopted the skill of excellent rhetorical speech, he would undoubtedly

12 Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, pp 151–53.

13 Paul describes himself as a “master builder” (*architektōn*) (1 Cor 3:10); the Greek version of the Old Testament describes Hiram as a “builder” (*tektōn*) (1 Kgs 7:14).

have gained a hearing among those who valued it. He would have been persuasive. It would have been an effective, contextually appropriate way to deliver the saving package of Christ crucified in ancient Corinth. Wouldn't it?

But Paul does the opposite. Why? Because he recognises that the gospel of Christ crucified can't be limited that way. It's not merely a neat package to deliver. It's dynamite. It explodes all of our categories, including our gospel methods. As Don Carson observed more than three decades ago:

The cross not only establishes what we are to preach, but how we are to preach. It prescribes what Christian leaders must be and how Christians must view Christian leaders. ... The message of these sections from 1 Corinthians must be learned afresh by every generation of Christians, or the gospel will be sidelined by assorted fads.¹⁴

And so, Carson's warning to gospel ministers from 1 Corinthians 3 is still fresh today:

If the church is being built with large portions of charm, personality, easy oratory, positive thinking, managerial skills, powerful and emotional experiences, and people smarts, but without the repeated, passionate, Spirit-anointed proclamation of "Jesus Christ and him crucified," we may be winning more adherents than converts. ... It is not that we shall refuse any practical help from those who have something to say about technique or sociological profiles; rather, we will remain utterly committed to the centrality of the cross, not just at vague, theoretical levels, but in all our strategy and practical decisions. We will be fearful of adopting approaches that might empty the cross of Christ of its power (1:17), and the only approval we shall seek is his who tests the quality of each builder's work on the last day.¹⁵

The medicine and the antidote

To switch the metaphor again: worldly goal-driven pragmatic thinking is like a powerful drug that, in small and controlled doses, can help us grow healthy churches oriented to the salvation of the lost. But, like all powerful drugs, it's far too easy to overdose or become addicted. That's why we always need the antidote close at hand. The antidote is the gospel of Christ crucified. And that's why we need to remember 1 Corinthians 1-4 especially, where Paul applies this gospel to Christian ministry.

How do you know when you need to apply the antidote? Here are a few examples. You need to critique yourself with the gospel of Christ crucified:

- whenever you (or others) find yourself following a particular leader because you're

14 Carson, *Cross and Christian Ministry*, pp 9–10.

15 Carson, *Cross and Christian Ministry*, pp 80–81.

especially impressed by their human skills in systematic goal-driven ministry thinking.

- whenever you find those you minister to (or yourself) celebrating or becoming fascinated by human know-how, systems, measures, and strength.
- whenever you find yourself despising ministries that seem aimless and weak, while glorifying ministries that are goal-driven and measurably effective.

Actually, you need the gospel of Christ crucified all the time in your ministry. We can never take it for granted. It's not something we can just assume as a given. It must constantly humble and critique us:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:27-31)

Conclusion: Taking the gospel seriously

The two appeals in this article ultimately boil down to one thing: we must take the gospel *seriously*. We need to take the gospel seriously in our purposes, our preaching, and our methods. The gospel of Christ crucified gives us a *reason* to engage in goal-driven ministry. Yet, at the very same time, it *critiques* our human-centred goal-driven ministry. We must always remember that the message of the cross isn't merely a neat package for us to deliver using pragmatic methods. It's an explosive reality that turns our world upside-down. It destroys all merely human categories of thinking. It constantly critiques everything about us, including our lives, goals, and ministry methods. It must drive us to repentance—both in our personal lives and in our ministries. This will always be uncomfortable and (humanly speaking) inefficient. Yet, it's vital.

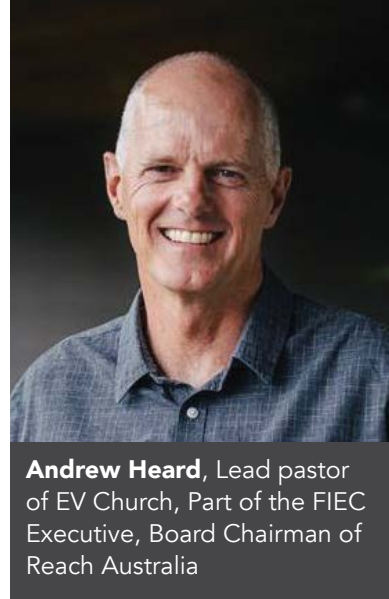
Taking the gospel seriously will drive us to prayer. It will lead us to change and adapt our lives and ministries to win people for Christ—all the while knowing that God is the one who brings salvation and growth. It will sometimes mean adopting some of the world's goal-driven wisdom in the service of the salvation of the lost. But it will always mean constantly bringing this wisdom back to the light of the gospel of Christ crucified. *This* is God's power. God will use this gospel to bring about his purposes. And graciously, he may even use us weak vessels to do it. **ACR**

Who is church for?

What is the purpose of church? In one important sense, church is an end in itself: we believe that church is a gathering *for the believer* to adore God and edify the saints. Throughout the New Testament, the church gathering is not primarily a 'mission event'. This is a well-established truth that deserves full acceptance.

But it is far from the whole story.

This is true for several reasons. If we only say 'church is for the believer', we are missing a critically important opportunity. More importantly, we might even be demonstrating that something is missing in our theological convictions, and we will shape a church culture in unhealthy directions.



Andrew Heard, Lead pastor of EV Church, Part of the FIEC Executive, Board Chairman of Reach Australia

Can we just run church for the insider? Is there no place for a mission priority?

There seems to be a couple of options here.

One is the 'either/or' answer: church is *either* for the insider, *or* it is for the outsider. If we take this path and conclude that insiders are primary, then shaping our gatherings with the outsider in mind will be seen as compromising the biblical priority. This thinking might well see 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 through the lens of something 'accidental': church is *accidentally* useful to outsiders; their participation is peripheral, and their presence at the gathering is something Paul only considers tangentially. Any positive impact is simply the fruit of church doing church for the insider. So, we focus entirely on insiders, and trust that any outsider who happens to wander in will be touched by God in some way.

It is, of course, possible to find enough stories of this happening to reinforce the belief.

But is there another option? Could it be a case not of ‘either/or’, but of ‘both/and’?

Is it possible to shape church so that it might be for believers, properly achieving its purpose as an occasion to adore God and edify the saints, while at the same time also achieving wonderful and significant mission outcomes—not just as a happy by-product of something else, but as a central and intentional part of our ministries?

As might be obvious, I think the Bible’s answer is yes.

At a very simple level, at least two strands of biblical thought suggest this is possible. The ‘Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs’ we sing (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16) can adore and edify while also advertising. See Psalm 9:11 or Psalm 18:49, etc.¹⁶ They can serve a maturity and mission purpose at one and the same time. And consider the word we preach. The word that grows believers is the same word that saves unbelievers (1 Cor 15:1–11; 1 Pet 1:22–2:3). The word we hear preached in church has a maturity purpose and a mission purpose at one and the same time (1 Cor 14:24, 25).

We could add to this a rich history of experience. I dare to suggest I’ve seen the ‘both/and’ principle work to great effect. With care and thought, it is possible to construct a service



A pastor or pastoral team captivated by the importance of seeking and saving the lost will shape everything they do by this priority.



that not only edifies the saints but is also understandable and compelling to outsiders. It’s possible to construct services such that Christians want their unconverted friends to come so they can taste and see. And we still live at a time where many non-Christians are willing to do just that—to come to church so they can taste and see. Recent NCLS data tells us that fully one third of Australians would come to church if invited by a friend.¹⁷

Importantly, I don’t mean that ‘both/and’ conveys some kind of equivalence between the two—as if they are two equal priorities. The edification of believers is central and foundational to the gathering. But I believe it is possible to achieve the maturity aim and maximise the mission aim, without compromising the core aim of maturity.

If this understanding is correct, two important questions follow.

16 cf Rob Smith’s excellent book *Come Let Us Sing*, Latimer Trust, 2020, p 79f

17 See the ‘openness to invitation to church’ slide at ncls.org.au/articles/webinar-what-australians-really-think-about-jesus-and-the-church-today/#slides

1. If 'both/and' is possible, why wouldn't we pursue it?

There may be three reasons: it takes more effort, it means we need to change things, and it carries risks. Basically, it's harder to do.

We only do harder things if we really care about the worth of the harder thing. It's always easier to go with the easier—by default, if for no other reason. We would therefore only pursue the 'both/and' option if we were deeply committed to maximising mission.

And so, we come to the second (and perhaps bigger) question.

2. Are we deeply committed to mission?

Choices reveal values. Our conclusions are so often predetermined by the things we bring to the discussion. A passionate mission-minded person will look to maximise mission at every point, while someone less concerned about mission won't even notice that an opportunity has been missed.

If 'both/and' is possible, what would stop us pursuing it? It would no longer be an exegetical or theological issue. It would be a heart issue, revealed in the way we do church.

And what we do in church has enormous consequences.

Consider the 'seeker services' trend that began in the 1980s. This trend had huge consequences for the total culture of church life. Even though many churches took steps to express the maturity priority—such as starting a midweek service—Sunday remained the 'flagship' event. It shaped the culture. Seeker services slowly eroded people's heart for maturity.

We see the other side of the coin with churches that focus their gatherings almost entirely on insiders and have no real mission concern. These kinds of services slowly shape the mission heart of every individual. And perhaps they reflect the true heart of the leadership team.

A pastor or pastoral team captivated by the importance of seeking and saving the lost will shape everything they do by this priority. As they shape church towards mission aims, a culture will form—a culture where every individual is also captivated by the importance of seeking and saving. This will become a multiplier that cascades out into the daily lives of every believer, which then feeds back into the gathered life of the church family, which will be even more compelling. And the cycle will continue.

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What we do in church matters. This is why the 'either/or' or 'both/and' discussion is so important. It's why we must avoid simplistic answers and allow the Bible to stretch us, both in our thinking and in our practice. **ACR**

A whirlwind interview with Rico Tice

on Chappo, the church and the gospel we preach

Rico Tice was until recently the Senior Minister for Evangelism at All Souls Langham Place in London where he served for nearly thirty years. From September 2023 he transitioned to working full time for the organisation that he founded, Christianity Explored Ministries. He lives with his wife Lucy and their two teenage children in London.

Micky Mantle has since September 2021 served as the Rector of St Thomas', North Sydney. Prior to that he was on the staff at St Helen's Bishopsgate in London.

Micky Mantle: Rico, it is great to speak with you. Really appreciate your time. How did it all begin for you? How were you converted?

Rico Tice: On the sixth of August 1982, my godfather was killed in a cliff fall. He was my uncle as well. I remember the phone call coming in. And I remember so vividly no one in the family having an answer to his death. In the new *Hope Explored* course¹⁸ we have this thing of 'How do you see life? Does it go up? Does it go down? Does it go in circles? Is it just chaos?' My family, I think, thought life went up, it got better and better. And suddenly someone's dead. And there was just no answer. And I hadn't been told an answer at school either. But a Maths teacher at school said to me, 'Look, when Christ rose from the dead, He rose to get you *through* death'.

18 <https://www.thegoodbook.com.au/hope-explored-episodes>



Rico Tice, Co-Founder of Christianity Explored Ministries



Micky Mantle, Rector of St Thomas', North Sydney

Sometimes conversion is waking up. And it was such a clear sense of waking up to my mortality. You know the Ecclesiastes verse, 'God has put eternity in the hearts of men' [Ecc 3:11], that was woken up. And then a little verse was shown to me: 'As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field, the wind blows, his place is no more'—we can flourish, but then we're gone—but from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him' [Psa 103:15-17]. But if you link up with God, you will live forever. So it's madness not to link up with God. So my eyes were opened to eternity, that the god of this age no longer blinded me to this age with that death.

And then I kept a diary too, because I thought I was such a great guy that I needed to record my life! And, again, it was waking up to my own sin, as I reflected each day on it. You know, Rousseau was: 'the problem is people outside forcing me to misbehave'. So it's: children are born good and then they're evil. But I found as I reflected, I was with Augustine: my heart was just evil. I thought, why am I doing that? And the cross was the answer to that diary.

So those two things: the death of my godfather and keeping a diary. And then, fortunately, a Maths teacher, Christopher Ash. He ran a little Christian meeting, and my brother and I both came to faith.

Micky: Praise God for waking you up and using Christopher and that little meeting! It was through the ministry of the Scripture Union Camps that supported those meetings in your school that you were discipled and later encouraged into Christian ministry as an evangelist specifically. Another huge influence on you was our own John Chapman. Can you tell us a bit about him and what stood out for you as he helped you develop as an evangelist?

Rico: Yeah, Chappo's humanity. He was such a laugh. Chappo was so wonderfully himself.

Also, when he spoke to people, the tone was always one of such love. I suddenly saw someone I could—you know, he just was always *for* you, Chappo. And he believed in the Holy Spirit, and he taught the truth. And you just felt that tremendous sense of his personal warmth, and the humour.

And the ability to rebuke. So of course, one day driving back from Newcastle [UK]—I'd gone up to a church with him to hear him preach—and he said to me, 'You don't believe in the church, do you?' And I said, 'Well, I do'. He said, 'No, you don't'; he said, 'You do all this one-to-one work'. And there's a very strong personal work tradition in the Scripture Union Camps here. He said, 'The church looks after people'. Do you know, he said that and then in the car next to him, I started to weep. I didn't show him that. But I did. Because suddenly, the pressure of all these people I was trying to look after on my own as the personal chaplain. But no, it's the church which looks after people.

So love the church, feed people *into* the church; that's were they're to be. And then you say to everyone in the church that Jesus says, 'If you love me, feed my sheep' [John 21]. We've all got to be about caring for the sheep. So that was an amazing moment on church. As an evangelist, and for lots of evangelists, the key question is not, 'Do you love the gospel?' Or 'Do you love evangelism?' So often they do. *But do you love your local church?* And Chappo, he so much loved his local church.

Micky: So a commitment and love for the local church was a key lesson. What other things stand out to you as you look back?

Rico: The trust that you just get the Bible open and teach it. I remember the Oxford mission in 1993. Chappo was doing Luke's Gospel and he just simply taught passages about Jesus. And I've always tried to do that. I mean, you know, Chappo did it with dazzling humour. But he just taught the passage. And the clarity! So the power's in the Word. Now a great question in evangelism is where do you think the power is? It's in God's word. So he taught the Word.

Secondly, God is sovereign. So you know, God has put you next to your neighbour. I remember once going up to the Blue Mountains with him and something was shut and he said, 'Oh Rico, that's guidance. God's sovereign, He's just decided what we'd do'.

Thirdly, identity in the grace of God. Whether someone accepts or rejects you doesn't make you more valuable. What makes you valuable is that Christ died for you! (I can just hear Chappo's voice.) So your identity's in the grace of God. You're teaching people, and if they're rejecting you, then you're secure in the gospel, but their problem is with God, as Romans 1:1 says, 'the gospel of God'. You're just the piano; God is the player. You've got to let them take that to God, but you be faithful.

So many of those key theological truths came from him.

Micky: You're perhaps best known around the world for the *Christianity Explored* course. Tell us about the background and influences in that.

Rico: We owe a huge debt to Michael Bennett for *Christianity Explained*. And Michael Bennett had got a lot of the *Christianity Explained* material off Chappo, who'd got it off Dick Lucas, and that was Mark's Gospel. So there was a real heritage of Dick Lucas at St Helen's Bishopsgate, and Chappo comes over and does the missions. Does loads of stuff with Dick. Chappo said the most important thing he ever did in his ministry was pick this mad Englishman up from the airport. They became friends, and Chappo did so much ministry, but Dick gave Chappo Mark's Gospel, and Chappo passed a lot of that on to Michael Bennett. I was running that then. So there was a real legacy of: we use Mark's Gospel in evangelism, via St Helen's and 'Read Mark Learn', who helped me write it.

Micky: Now the course came about in the 90s when the *Alpha* course was already well known and being widely used in the UK and beyond. Why did you feel the need to create something else when *Alpha* was already going?

Now, the *Alpha* course has been amazing because it put people into groups. Nicky Gumbel would say, 'Let's do evangelism, not just one-to-one, but let's go and tell people but then come and hear back at church in a group. And then you hear other people's journeys'. We've certainly picked that up with *Christianity Explored*. You know, 'Here's Mark's Gospel, ask any question you want, let's do a journey together'. And I'm very thankful to God for *Alpha* and for that model of evangelism.

But for example, 'How can I be sure of my faith?' is week three of *Alpha*. That means they're asking you to make a profession of faith in week three. I think it's madness! So, with *Christianity Explored*, the reason we developed it even back in the 90s, we said they need far longer to look at their sin. *Alpha* talks about 'separation from God' in week four, which I don't think is enough. They use the word 'sin', they talk about the cross, but they don't talk about wrath and hell, which is what we do from Mark chapter 9 in *Christianity Explored*. *Christianity Explored* does sin, judgement, wrath and hell, in order that the wonder of grace be in place.

Then, the ultimate place where people are encountering God with *Alpha* is the experience of the Spirit on the weekend away. In *Christianity Explored*, with reformed conservative theology, we're encountering God as an experience of grace, having been shown how sinful we are. Now you've got to decide which one you want to have: do you want to go via experience? Now of course, experience is great, but I can't legislate the work of the Spirit on the weekend away. I'm not saying it's not authentic what happens. But I'm saying: what happens to people's assurance, then? If I've come via a Holy Spirit experience on the weekend away—and again, I'm not saying it's not authentic—what am I expecting as I go on?

With *Christianity Explored*, you're going through Mark's Gospel, you're seeing your sin, you're being told there's a judgement to come. So the resurrection is not just a great hope, it's a great warning. And then you're being told the grace of God is amazing. So you're more wicked than you ever imagined, but more loved than you ever dreamed. You have to decide:



Chappo taught me that I'm for what Jesus is for, and I'm against what he's against.



go through a Gospel with sin, judgement, wrath, hell, or, again, a helicopter ride round the Christian faith with *Alpha*? The emphasis is on an experience and an encounter. I think you encounter God through sin, grace, joy, but it's a different methodology.

Uncle John [Stott]¹⁹ was very nervous of experience being something that leads to liberalism. So he was very worried about *Alpha* opening the door to that. So often, the spearhead of liberalism into the church is evangelism because you're trying to cut the ice, be 'all things to all men', so how do we grab them? But again, the focus on experience in *Alpha* made him [John Stott] very nervous because people's assurance is then in their feelings. And if I've had an experience of God and you've had an experience of God, of course we can come together.

And of course you can have the most liberal person that will say to you, 'Well I've had this experience of Jesus' and they are in a very promiscuous relationship, heterosexual or homosexual, but they're saying, 'I'm loving this experience of Jesus'. It is what is happening in the Church of England now with the clergy. Because if the clergy are meeting over a claim of personal experience, then the lordship of Jesus can be put on one side.

Micky: You are in the thick of the battle with liberalism in the UK and have recently, in fact, left the Church of England in order to dissociate *Christianity Explored* from an apostate denomination. Our situation in Sydney as Anglicans is by God's grace so different. And yet it is all too easy to take that all for granted. What would you say to us about that?

Rico: Well, fight for it. Now, one of the things Chappo told me was you have to fight for things politically. That doesn't mean that Chappo was underhanded, it meant within the processes that were there to elect officials, you have to have a voice, you have to give time to it.

Chappo taught me that the most important passage on evangelism was 2 Corinthians 4:1-6. And therefore we're always working out what does it mean to distort the Word of God? And to be careful about that. I think the two issues we've got to hold in place are wrath and repentance. So God's sovereign control, his personal hostility to evil, preaching sin and judgement, crossing the pain line on doing wrath and hell. And repentance.

Chappo taught me that I'm for what Jesus is for, and I'm against what he's against. So as I preach repentance, I hold my nerve, because God will regenerate people. 2 Corinthians 4:6: He will send His Holy Spirit to change their hearts, as I hold my nerve and say 'Jesus is Lord'. Wrath and repentance are the two words by which our ministry will stand or fall.

Micky: Rico I really appreciate your time. It has been a challenge and encouragement to hear from you. Thank you so much! **ACR**

19 Rico was on the staff of All Souls, Langham Place with John Stott who continued to serve as Rector Emeritus. Rico's creation of *Christianity Explored* was in a significant part driven by Stott's concern about *Alpha* and Stott's encouragement to him to create an alternative evangelistic course that was grounded in the gospel and that did not suffer from what Stott saw as *Alpha*'s theological shortcomings.

How to get your church fired up for evangelism

Evangelism is tough. Of course, you know that already. Telling people about Jesus presents a series of challenges and difficulties for Christian people.

Yet when it comes to evangelism, that's not the most difficult thing. No, that title well and truly falls to 'being responsible for trying to get other Christians to actually do it'. Studies from the United States indicate that although nearly 90% of professing evangelical Christians believe evangelism is something they should do, roughly the same proportion of them don't do it. In other words, the people in the pews of our churches want to do it, they believe they should do it, but they largely don't.

So, for those of us who are either responsible for or invested in the evangelistic energy of their local church, the question is simple. What can be done? What can we do to help get our churches fired up for evangelism?

After all, as tempting as it may be to give up, that can never be an option. If we are to see Australia won for Christ, it must involve the active and reactive participation of Christians. Why?

Let me offer 3 reasons:

1. We need Christians to reach non-Christians

It's both statistically and anecdotally true that the vast majority of people who become Christians as adults do so through some kind of interaction with a Christian in their life.



Dave Jensen, Assistant Director of Evangelism New Churches (ENC) who exist to see more people in more places find life and hope in Jesus Christ.

God has used Christians for 2000 years to pass on the news of salvation that can only come through the gospel.

2. Telling other people about Jesus is a key way Christians grow to become like Jesus

In Luke 9:23 Jesus tells the crowds that if anyone wanted to be his disciple, they must follow him. The centre of the life of Jesus was both the achievement and proclamation of his Father's gospel (Luke 19:10). It is not possible to imagine becoming like Jesus without being captured with the same mission he poured his life into.

3. Jesus tells us to do it

The call to Christian people has been clear since the risen Lord Jesus declared it to his disciples. We are to 'go and make disciples' (Matt 28:19).

But it doesn't end there. The Bible also presents a reality of the life and perspective of all Christian people which is astonishing. The following is what we know to be true of all born-again believers:

1. Christians have God's Spirit in them, such that they truly know the gospel (even if they can't explain it clearly).
2. Christians love Jesus.
3. Christians love their non-Christian 'neighbours' and want them to be saved.
4. Christians *may* be pessimistic about evangelism, and for fear of having their hopes dashed, may shy away from evangelising their neighbours, whom they truly love. This is a miserable state for a Christian to exist in, and we want to help them.

So as church leaders, what is it we should desire from and for our people? More evangelism, more often, and more effectively done, for the salvation of the lost, the maturity of the saints, and obedience to our Lord's commands.

How do we do it?

The million-dollar question is...how? It's one thing to desire a church fired up for evangelism, but how do we as leaders go about facilitating it?

I have spent the best part of a decade looking into how to answer that question. I have done so not because it came naturally to me, but because it didn't.

My first endeavours into engaging the church I pastored in evangelistic activity were a complete and utter failure. By failure I don't mean 'no one was converted'. I mean that often the events I put on had no non-Christians attend them at all! I tried guest speakers, celebrity interviews, training Bible studies, and ran more and different types of courses than you could imagine. Whilst from time to time my church family did invite people to the different

events, it never resulted in any conversions. Worse still, rather than encouraging the people in my church, the lack of fruit actually worked to undermine their confidence in undertaking evangelism.

As a pastor, I ended up feeling utterly discouraged and disappointed. So much so that over time, in order to explain and justify the lack of fruit I was facing, I ended up drifting towards what were deeply unhelpful positions.

For example, I would engage in one or all of the following thought processes:

- **Blame the soil:** looking for excuses for my fruitlessness from the culture my churches were part of, despite the fact that other churches who laboured in the same place as I did were actually seeing fruit.
- **Blame other churches:** confronted with fruit from others, I would silently accuse them of somehow softening their message or becoming ‘seeker services’, despite absolutely no evidence of the sort.
- **Blame the congregation:** whenever I would attempt an event or endeavour that wasn’t participated in as I would like, I would point the finger at the people whom God had given me to shepherd and lead, ignoring the fact that I was the one he had given them to lead!
- **Shift the goal posts:** I would tell myself fake news, pretending as if my failed attempts at engaging my church family in evangelistic practice were actually success, and that all I was really called to do by God was to make the effort. I could surely do no more than that!

This was my thinking for several years as my discouragement turned into bitterness, and eventually resentment; until something happened. Something that was initially alarming, then challenging, but eventually transformative.

God humbled me. He did so by allowing me to interact with churches led by men close to me who believed the same things that I did about Jesus, the Bible and church. They were just as guarded and suspicious of ‘seeker services’ and ‘easy believe-ism’ as I was. They were men I grew to respect and admire; and even better still they led or were on the staff teams of churches that were seeing two things take place. Firstly, they were seeing their people fired up for evangelism. Secondly, they were seeing people becoming Christians; real ones! No theological compromise in sight, but a steady stream of people converted.

So why was I alarmed?

Because meeting and growing to respect these men meant I came face to face with a series of questions that were very uncomfortable.

Was it possible that the problem was not that the soil is too hard, but rather that we are too soft?

Was it possible the problem is not with the society, but with the strategy?

Was it possible the issue was not with my church, but with its leader (me)?

As I asked myself those questions, I was forced to face reality: that if people around me labouring in the same field as I was and preaching the same gospel as I was were seeing fruit, and I wasn't, the most likely answer to all of those questions was a resounding 'Yes'!

While answering those questions was initially difficult, what came forth was a growing awareness that rather than this being bad news, it was actually incredibly liberating. Because if there were people around me in the same context who were seeing conversions, then it was possible that I could too. The wisest thing for me to do would be to speak to them, observe what they do, understand why they do it, how it works, and then attempt to replicate where possible similar principles in the churches I worked in.



But there's one place above all others that makes the biggest difference: the pulpit.



So what was it that these pastors and leaders did which produced both evangelistic zeal, and evangelistic fruit?

They recognised the depths of both the presenting problem, and the necessary cure.

The problem

What is it that stops Christians evangelising?

The same thing that stops *you* doing it: fear. But not just any fear; deep down most of us have a paralysing fear of being rejected. It's so strong that most of us would rather go through any other pain than face it. Now this is a problem because rejection and evangelism often go hand in hand.

What does all of this mean?

It means that to get people going in evangelism, we really need to help them face that fear. We don't need to pretend it's not scary, or that there's a version of evangelism which exists that will make you popular and well liked.

No, the only way for us to face and conquer fear regarding evangelism is to show the Christians in our churches that the pain is worth it. Yes, you will experience it: but that should not stop you. Keep going because it's worth it no matter what.

What do we have to do?

It's simple. We need to continuously remind the Christians we know that:

Jesus died and rose from the dead for the salvation of sins...
so anyone who repents and believes will be saved.

That whilst sin has cut us off from God and brought us under his wrath, salvation is possible through trusting in the gospel...
So above all things, people need to hear the gospel.

Eternity is real...

So what matters most is what happens next, not the here and now.

By trusting in Jesus we have eternal life, guaranteed...

So we must tell people the gospel so they will enjoy heaven with us.

God is sovereign over all things, including salvation...

So there is no one too far for God.

The risen King Jesus rules and reigns with authority...

So no conversation you will have is outside of his remit.

He is with us, always, until the end of the age...

So you need not be afraid, for he is with you always.

The Holy Spirit is active and revealing the truth about Jesus Christ...

There is no sinner too wretched as to be beyond God's saving power.

The harvest is plentiful...

God is still saving people, even in Australia.

Everyone on earth believes in the Christian God, even though they've suppressed the truth...

So you don't need to be an expert in every worldview; you just need to speak the gospel.

Without Jesus people are going to hell, forever. However, if they trust in the gospel they can be saved...

So we must care more for their eternal future than our present fears.

How? When? Where?

But how on earth are you meant to do that?

The answer is week in, week out, every week, in everything you do, across a lifetime. It doesn't happen in one place, but in every part of your church's life. It won't happen by a training course, evangelistic technique or book, although these things will play a part. It won't happen by doing an 'add-on' program.

It happens from having the conviction, deep down in your bones, that what matters *most* in this life is what happens *next*; eternal life, purchased and provided through the gospel of Jesus. It happens from being so convicted of these eternal realities that you allow them to shape the very culture and direction of church life.



Where can you do this? Everywhere!

In the way your growth groups are written and studied. In your prayers, corporate and private. In the way you speak in services, the way you sing to God, in what you speak about and celebrate, in the way you plan your calendar. In the way you run your evangelistic course, and the way you speak about it before, during and after.

But there's one place above all others that makes the biggest difference: the pulpit.

Preachers: as we preach, our people will follow. As we preach, the culture of our churches is shaped. The Christian people we're called to shepherd need us to lead them into the jaws of fear: and show them that no matter what, it's always worth it.

Brothers! Sisters! The harvest is plentiful! We've got much to do! Let's get to work. **ACR**

The agony and ecstasy of the church prayer meeting

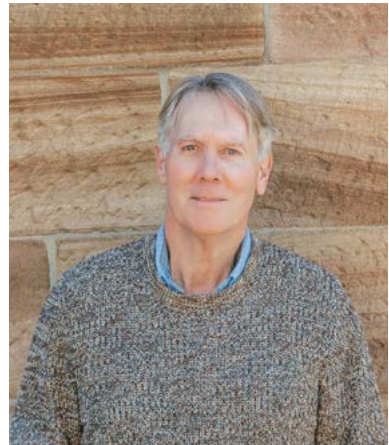
Desperation

Please forgive two brief and tiny anecdotes which are to remind you that God is completely on top of His gospel mission.

I was once telling God in my prayers that the days of 'leading people to Christ' seemed to be fast disappearing and in a rare outburst I said to Him, "things are not going to work unless YOU DO SOMETHING!" (I heard John Chapman pray this once in a small prayer meeting). Anyway, that evening I went down the road for a pizza and sat on a bench to eat, and a lady came and sat on the bench too. She asked me what I did for a job and when I told her, she said, "I know nothing about Christianity—tell me what it's about".

I laughed out loud as I walked home because the gospel door opened so widely that it had to be God's doing—and I simply make the point to you (and to me) that the desperate prayer may a good way to pray. Careless prayers are a worry.

And then I was telling God recently that my witness to my neighbours had been too fruitless—a tract with biscuits at Christmas, a book lent here and there, taking one or two to hear a speaker, but no real breakthroughs. Once again, I told God with some emotion that I was helpless and hopeless. Within the hour I was taking the bins out and a man three doors up the road—who had always scoffed at my faith—walked across my driveway. It was impossible not to meet. But this time he was frail with a Zimmer frame. We got talking about



Simon Manchester was Rector of St Thomas' North Sydney for 30 years and is now involved with All Saints Woollahra in his retirement

health and mortality and I said, “This is why eternal life is so important”. He nodded and I said a little more—then took him Chappo’s book *Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life*. The link between my more desperate prayer and the very precise answer struck me again.

Confidence

Of course it is not our emotion or language or godliness—or even our desperation—that forces God’s interest in our prayers. The scripture wonderfully tells us that “His ear is ever open to our cry” and that we should “cast our cares because He cares” for us. It’s because of who He is and because of who we are that prayers arrive in His ear. He has committed Himself to our prayers.

There have been times when I’ve been talking with a young mum at church—and the things I’ve been saying to her have been of course fascinating and riveting stuff—but she turns away from my blabber because she has heard the cry of her child. It’s always a reminder to me that the cry of the believer is deeply, deeply interesting to God—more than we or anyone else may think.

This confidence in God’s interest in our prayers needs to be recaptured. Too many believers have little or no confidence that their prayer is really doing anything and simply go through the motions because it’s the thing to do. The idea that words spoken to God would be heard, heeded, taken seriously and would ‘move the machinery of heaven’ has almost disappeared from view. But the work of Jesus has secured our adoption and our adoption means access to the throne of a Heavenly Father and at the throne of our Heavenly Father, He takes our words seriously. We may not take them seriously, but He does.

George Herbert defined prayer as “reversed thunder”, based on the words in Revelation 8 that our prayers go up to God (with incense) and produce thunder and lightning on the earth. Remember that a call to 000 may be done very poorly but it will probably be answered very seriously. A prayer to God may be weak, but He is not.

So, I hold these two ideas of desperation and confidence together—that we should know and feel and express our desperation and that He is worthy of our confidence as the Father who actually listens and responds perfectly.

Church prayer meetings and Christian evangelism

For thirty years in the one parish, we set aside ninety minutes every two months for prayer together. Six prayer meetings per year. Was this too few? The hope was to bring everyone together to a well-planned night without having them so often as to add too many more nights out for busy people. Over the years there were prayer meetings marked by good attendance and great joy—and others marked by smaller attendance and great struggle.

I wish I could say that church prayer meetings always left me with pure joy but the reality was agony and ecstasy. I once walked home from a UK prayer meeting with my senior minister and commented that it was quite a small gathering, to which he replied, “But those of us who came had a wonderful time”. I wish I had that equilibrium.



It's because of who He is and because of who we are that prayers arrive in His ear. He has committed Himself to our prayers.



It is wonderfully true that the church prayer meeting is marked by God “drawing near” to us as we “draw near” to Him. I used to say to the congregations beforehand, “You may drag yourselves to the prayer meeting but you will skip yourselves home”—so great is the blessing of God on such an exercise. But I’m also conscious that many don’t come to the prayer meeting and though many may have totally good reasons for missing it, it remains a subset of the church.

Given that prayer will take place in small groups of families and leaders and Bible studies, is a prayer meeting for the whole ‘parish’ a good idea? A necessary thing? It seems to me that it communicates to God that all of us under the local church umbrella are His grateful, sinful, needful people but it also communicates to the whole body of believers that we are united in spiritual work and battle together. And while most Christians find it hard to pray for an hour, the prayer meeting makes it possible.

Going back to the ideas of ‘desperation’ and ‘confidence’, is it not a very wise thing to communicate through the prayer meetings that everything we do as Christians—especially seeing lives transformed—is completely beyond us (desperation) but not beyond Him (confidence)?

I would like to testify to the mercy and power of God that those prayer meetings—done in such weakness—were honoured by God in leading us into fruitful paths of evangelism that we could never have planned if our lives depended on it.

So here are some things that have helped our meetings—and I offer these knowing that the organising and ‘ingredients’ of a prayer meeting are no substitute for the humble heart and the wind of the Spirit.

- a. **The invitation:** Invite people with all the grace of God. Don’t make attendance the mark of salvation or the key to your affection for people.
- b. **Well planned:** The handout was given at the door, the chairs arranged, the music practised and the helpers chosen.
- c. **Removing awkwardness:** Think carefully about how the meeting will be a pleasure not a torture. Better to collect ten things to be thankful for and have someone pray, than say there will be ten minutes of open thanks—leaving people stuck for ideas. Make it as normal and easy as you can.
- d. **Confession:** This should be a private time with a group prayer to follow. Public confession can be awkward.
- e. **Volunteers:** Asking individuals beforehand if they would pray for areas like children, youth, houseparty, sick people, etc. can produce more thoughtful prayers.

- f. **Song/Praise:** Break up the hour with songs since praise is fitting in a prayer meeting. And cut out some verses if needed.
- g. **Global mission:** Hear news (via a link?) of your own missionaries or open a window into a part of the world that people would do well to know about. This can take ten minutes in the meeting so think about good brief prayer to follow.
- h. **Small groups:** 5-6 people pray well together and give kind, careful guidance on the 'ABC' of group prayer—to be Audible, Brief and Concrete. In other words, help people to hear you, don't go on and on (Matt 6:7) and pray with a specific request. Don't give groups too little time or too much time—otherwise they struggle to cope or persevere.
- i. **Group wisdom:** Have an 'open time' from the floor to hear about things for prayer that the leader may be unaware of—sick people, missions coming, happy and sad events etc., but then have one or two turn it all into prayer.
- j. **Personal:** Include a time to pray for one another in small groups so people can mention a specific thing for prayer and someone (next to them?) prays about it.
- k. **Finally,** as you wind up, remind people that the prayers that have ascended to heaven have been heard by a great and good God. Who knows how greatly the Lord will answer? Then go home (pastors especially) thankful for the privilege that outweighs the numbers who came.

Evangelism

Is the prayer meeting—small or great—a key part of evangelism?

More than we can ask or imagine. **ACR**

Sharing Jesus in schools

An interview with Maree Jones

Bronwyn Windsor: How long have you been teaching Scripture (Special Religious Education)?

Maree Jones: I began as a young uni student in the late 70s/early 80s in the Thirroul-Austinmer parish, so I taught at every little primary school from Thirroul to Coledale. I also did a class at Bulli High School. I remember I walked in with my guitar, and I sat on the table at the front. The students were used to the old minister teaching their Scripture lesson so of course they all started being silly. I pulled them into line and started singing and they joined in, and they had a great time.

BW: Why did you start?

MJ: Well it was to give the minister a break for a few weeks so he could go on holidays. It was because I knew the truth – God’s truth. This generation talks about ‘my truth’ and ‘your truth’. I knew I was sharing the truth about God, and this is why I’m still teaching Scripture!

I eventually became a primary school teacher, so I couldn’t teach SRE then but I could support the SRE teachers in my leadership roles at schools. However when I started working as a teacher, there were actually Bible lessons in the state curriculum! But as schools became more liberal in their curriculum and I knew that local churches were struggling to get SRE teachers, I decided 15 years ago to take one day off work a week to be able to teach SRE at La Perouse primary school, which was great fun! I walked in there quite a few years older and still with a guitar!



Maree Jones is a semi-retired career teacher with a heart for the gospel for Aboriginal people. She belongs to St Nicolas’ Anglican Church in Coogee and Living Water Community Church in Redfern.

BW: What area of Sydney do you teach in? Have you taught anywhere else apart from in Sydney?

MJ: I spent 8 years working as a literacy trainer in the Northern Territory with post-school Aboriginal adults. I could do anything literacy-related so one thing I used to do was gospel singing – the local kids used to come up to the local Lutheran church and we would have a gospel sing-along. When I came back from the Territory I taught SRE at Alexandria Park (a community school for K-12) and I also teach SRE at Coogee Public School.

BW: What changes have you seen in your time as a Scripture teacher?

MJ: Sadly, classes have got smaller because of Ethics classes being introduced in competition to SRE. That's the big change. The 'good moral education' parents used to send their kids to Scripture but now they may send them to Ethics instead.

BW: What evangelistic opportunities do you see?

MJ: The kids in the class invite their friends to join, and even kids walking past the room want to join, because we're having fun. We have to say 'ask your parents'. The kids are drawn to it because the Scripture teacher is an adult who cares for them and is sharing God's love with them.

The Scripture lesson material wants the students to understand God's love for them in Jesus in a real way in their struggles and their plights. The lessons show real people from the Bible who experienced God's love for them in a real situation – for example, when they were thrown into a pit, or living with a disease for a long time.

A big opportunity as a co-ordinator of SRE is being able to forge a link with the Catholic Scripture teachers as well as classroom teachers, and also working with the school executive – we show that we have an interest in supporting the school as a caring environment. We can also invite parents to combined Scripture lessons. Building those relationships includes things like being well prepared, having kind discipline, being friendly with the school staff – and caring! Being able to say, 'I'll pray for that'. It's a really important role.

BW: What are the challenges?

MJ: The hardest challenge is working with school staff who don't see the value of Scripture in schools, even though the Department of Education says that Scripture in schools is a valuable part of the broad education that the department wants to give students, including the pastoral care that Scripture in schools provides.

BW: Can you tell us about any children you know who have come to know Jesus through SRE?

MJ: At Alexandria Park, a student in the Year 5/6 class, who had been coming to Scripture for two years, said to his carer, 'Grandma, I want to go to church' so he and his grandma now go

to their local church together.

One of the kids at Coogee Public School was invited through his Scripture class to come to church for a Father's Day service, and he was so excited to come that he made sure his parents brought him along. They saw that church was a fun place, not just an old and dowdy place.

I'm seeing kids from K-2 that I saw again in Year 3, and again in Year 5 and 6, growing in their knowledge and love of God.

BW: How can our readers support/get involved in SRE?

MJ: Definitely pray for those in your church who are involved in SRE!

Get involved – start off as a helper in the Scripture classroom (someone to sit with the wrigglers!). For high schools, they like helpers to just be there, especially uni students. Two's company in a classroom – it makes teaching the lesson easier.

You can also do the training to become an SRE Scripture teacher at www.youthworks.net/sre/training.

As a young teenage Christian, my church was dedicated to growing people who could share the gospel – so I learnt how to teach the truths of the Bible as a 14-year-old girl at St Andrew's Sans Souci, and it's stood me in good stead. So grow your Christian youth!

BW: Thank you Maree! **ACR**

Evangelism in Bathurst Diocese

Sharing Jesus for life

Through the goodness of God, combined with the kindness and service of his people, the Anglican Diocese of Bathurst has experienced renewal in recent years.

Fresh vision, boldness, and a firm grip upon biblical preaching and teaching has spread through its churches. Evangelism has been at the forefront of the minds of its leaders and very much within the hearts of its people.

Ultimately, there is nothing new under the sun when it comes to evangelism. It is simply sharing Jesus for life. Therefore, Bathurst Diocese has no new fancy technique to report. This diocese has modelled its evangelism from Scripture and has 'just got on with it'.

The determination and drive of Bishop Mark Calder at the helm, consecrated and installed in late 2019, has given a very clear path forward which is bearing fruit in lives won for the kingdom, and the church of God is flourishing. Bishop Calder came to bring gospel change, has maintained this objective, and by the grace of God, many have joined with him in sharing Jesus for life.

As I pause with others to reflect upon our evangelism, some key principles have emerged as being very significant for us.



James Daymond is the Strategic Planning Facilitator and Chair of the Strategic Planning Task Force in the Anglican Diocese of Bathurst. He is the Priest-in-Charge of St Paul's Anglican Church, Cobar and Field Staff with Bush Church Aid.

Prayer

People have been praying for this diocese for many years. As we have progressed in harness, we have been continually reminded of the importance of prayerful dependence upon God.

By and large, the people of this land have filled their lives with many things other than God. Their hearts are hard. However, we have been encouraged by the knowledge that God is concerned for these people and that he can break even the hardest of hearts. We have turned to God time and again to ask him to do just that as we recognise that God is God and we are not.

While it should be and may be obvious to many that prayer is where evangelism should start, in practice it is very often dropped down the batting order. The disciples were confronted by Jesus over their prayerlessness before doing ministry when he came down the mountain after his transfiguration. When asked by the disciples why they couldn't drive out the deaf and mute spirit, Jesus said, 'This kind can come out only by prayer' (Mark 9:29). Such a piercing rebuke could be equally applied to so much of ministry today, not least of all evangelism.

Knowing the priority and importance of prayer, we have sought to pray through normal means: individually, in prayer meetings and Bible studies, in church services, and at almost every diocesan gathering, of which there were many held online during the Covid era.

As will be no surprise with a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit, the desire for evangelism to spread throughout a region has not been confined to just one denomination. We have also seen the denominations join together diligently for regular prayer for evangelism over the last few years, almost entirely through the aid of virtual means.

Partnership

As prayers have been prayed, God has joined us with the wider body of Christ in partnership to supply what we need. Partnerships have been developed between our diocese and the Diocese of Sydney, with Bush Church Aid and all of the partner churches that such an arrangement brings, and between our churches and other churches beyond our diocese.

Prayers, encouragement, care, service, and financial support have flooded into this diocese to the point of being mind-blowing and clearly an act of God. These partnerships have been an immense blessing to this diocese that only a few years ago was on the brink of collapse.

The much-needed life-support that these partnerships have provided has quite simply, under God, enabled ministry to happen. We thank God for this and our partners as well!

Priority

Making evangelism a priority has been very much the order of the day. For many years in our diocese there has been a theoretical prioritising of evangelism, but like in many of our lives, it has not been a functional priority. In other words, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak!

Bishop Mark Calder's YouTube preaching ministry has been powerfully used by God to reach many previously unreached people



Bishop Mark Calder launching Sharing Jesus For Life, the Strategic Plan for the diocese



Moore College Mission at Bathurst Cathedral



Holiday Kids Club at Blayney (aided by Norwest Anglican and Scripture Union NSW)



Steadily, we have seen that evangelism has not only been prioritised theoretically but also functionally. This has been aided in large measure by the evangelistic edge that has come through the widespread preaching of Bishop Calder, boosted by the use of electronic media, and by his constant bringing to our remembrance the importance of sharing Jesus for life.

Prioritising evangelism was further formalised by the launch of the Strategic Plan for the diocese in July 2022, not least of all comprising the Mission Statement, 'Sharing Jesus For Life'. This two-page Strategic Plan presented many evangelistic options for parishes to consider for their local context. Some parishes are well under way with implementing their local strategy. In 2024, we hope to see an acceleration of parish investment in their strategy, aided in part by the appointment of a Strategic Planning Facilitator and Task Force to support them so that we can ensure that each parish is as effective as possible in making small steps in the right direction to share Jesus for life.

Personnel

There can be no mistaking that one of the greatest inroads in reaching people for Jesus has been through the gracious provision of gospel-hearted and skilled under-shepherds who are keen to share Jesus for life from the Bible.

The raising up of these ministers has coincided with the prayers of thousands and the keen focus of a bishop passionate to see church growth. Numerous trips

to preach and speak at theological and Bible colleges on the eastern seaboard have been combined with energetic advertising through social media, leading to the appointment of 14 new ministers in lay or ordained ministries.

The contribution that a parish minister makes in the tone that is set and in the equipping of the saints has an untold impact upon any church. Through such new appointments, church members have become clearer on the gospel, been strengthened in their resolve to share Jesus, and have been provided with an increasing number of avenues to do so.



Clergy Christmas Party 2023 with spouses, Dubbo

Proclamation

Clear, simple, and concise preaching that isn't boring has been strongly encouraged so that we can be as effective as possible in reaching a world with other priorities.

This type of preaching has not only brought refreshment to churches but also been used to bring the gospel to the unreached.

For instance, our bishop's sermons, recorded weekly on YouTube since his appointment, have been only one click of a mouse away from an unbeliever. Church members have never had an on-ramp to evangelism easier than sending an email to loved ones, friends, or acquaintances with a link to these sermons. I can well imagine God's Word reaching far-flung properties with temperamental satellite connections in locations that perhaps no minister or Christian has ever visited, thanks to modern technology.

Pursuit of Pathways New and Old

'Out with the old and in with the new', in terms of evangelistic programmes, has definitely not been the air we have breathed. Both new *and* old pathways for evangelism have been encouraged, explored, and developed.

Modern church services have perhaps been the primary new avenue for evangelism throughout the diocese. Among the parishes of the newly appointed ministers, most would have a modern service or be moving quickly in that direction. In some of these modern services, we have seen significant church growth!

The prevailing attitude has been to give anything a go that is godly and could possibly reach people for Jesus—an attitude that has been enlivening for many.

Older evangelistic pathways, in the sense of having been tried and tested over many years, have not been discarded. Such pathways as church services, evangelistic services, 'introducing people to Jesus' courses, door knocking, play groups, kids' clubs, children's and youth missions, op shops, and social events like trivia nights and bonfire nights have been rejuvenated and will continue to be well used.

Conclusion

The principles mentioned above will come as no surprise as being essential or very important ingredients for effective evangelism. By the grace of God, they have been a staple of evangelism in recent years in this diocese. We hope that these principles will always be present and not become extinct in the ministry of sharing Jesus for life in this diocese.

Should you be inspired to want to join with us in prayer, that would be fantastic! Or perhaps you are moved to want to team up with us and are keen to come and love God's people, share his word, and reach out to the lost. Maybe you are keen to formulate a parish partnership, fund a minister, or even send a minister! Whatever your situation, we would love to hear from you! Archdeacon Andrew Thornhill welcomes an email from you at mdo@bathurstanglican.org.au. **ACR**



Driving cattle at Narromine

Mission in the 21st century:

When it's for God's glory... and when it isn't

My wife Rachel and I recently visited some CMS missionaries in South-East Asia. We met the pastor of their church—a wonderful, godly man who had just returned from a mission trip himself. He had been working in western Kenya, helping equip churches to address some very practical issues.

So, we were visiting Australian missionaries in South-East Asia—who go to a church where their pastor is involved in mission in sub-Saharan Africa. That kind of thing is entirely normal in 21st century mission and shouldn't surprise us at all. Mission has been 'from everywhere to everywhere' for at least half a century.

As we talked with the CMS missionaries we were visiting, we found that they loved their church and their pastor. We also discovered that some other missionaries in the area tended to avoid local churches. They preferred to operate separately because they felt local churches slowed them down. Their goal was rapid gospel growth.

This experience in South-East Asia illustrates two significant themes of 21st century mission: listening to the voice of churches in places like South-East Asia or Kenya; and the desire to see rapid growth.



David Williams, Director of Development and Training for CMS Australia at St Andrew's Hall in Melbourne.

Mission as listening

'World Christianity' is the in vogue term for the majority of the world's Christians – that is, those in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It's a movement seeking to give voice to theologians and missiologists in non-Western, or at least non-Anglo, contexts.

Consider the frustration of Chilean theologian Gonzalo Arroyo who, when commenting on American theology professors, asked: "Why is it that when you speak of my theology you call it 'Latin American Theology', but when you speak of *your* theology you call it 'theology'?"

A significant proponent of world Christianity was Andrew Walls, a British missiologist who undertook an important re-examination of mission history. His research enables us to tell a more complete, more accurate story of 19th and 20th century Protestant mission.

Walls shows that the massive growth of Christianity in the past 200 years has typically followed a pattern: Western missionaries arrived and their ministry usually resulted in a very small number of local people becoming Christians. The explosive growth of a church typically came through the ministries of those local Christians, *not* the missionaries.

It was the evangelism of people like Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first Nigerian Anglican bishop, that led to great gospel growth. And yet, in 19th and early 20th century writings, the focus tended to be only on white missionaries. History ignored the contribution of world Christians.

All this has led to great interest in recovering a more accurate sense of our history. We are wonderfully recovering the stories of great saints like Apolo Kivebulaya, Angelina Noble, Samuel Crowther, Betsey Stockton and Pandita Ramabai, and learning from the missiologists and theologians of world Christianity.

In the 21st century, we have the joy of worshipping the Lord Jesus alongside brothers and sisters from many cultures and countries. We have the rich privilege of reading the Bible with different cultural perspectives. There are many wonderful things about world Christianity.

But there are also areas for concern. While it is wonderful to record history accurately, it doesn't help if we simply repeat past mistakes. Just as it wasn't wise to airbrush out non-Anglo people, it is not wise today to airbrush out Anglo mission work and give the impression that growth has come entirely from the national church.

A great theme within world Christianity has been the appeal to listen. To listen to the theologies and missiologies being written in the Global South. We absolutely need to do that. But in the hands of some this has been taken a step further, saying that Anglo Western churches should listen and also *stop speaking*. Some missiologists urge the West to take the road of humility and silence. Humility—yes, absolutely. Silence—surely not. To say that Western mission should be silent is clearly not a road we want to travel.

In a similar vein, the world Christianity narrative sometimes argues that mission is not about sending. We're told that sending is a neo-colonial narrative. But mission in the New Testament cannot be separated from the concept of sending.

Mission as growth

Of course, if we are gospel people, we long to see others come to know the Lord Jesus. The vision of CMS is a world that knows Jesus. That vision has an expectation of growth and transformation built into it. We want to reach gospel-poor peoples for Christ. Again, that imagines growth.

But there is a bigger story here. In contemporary missiology, we can trace ‘mission as growth’ back to American missionary and missiologist, Donald McGavran. He argued that while many things were included under the umbrella of mission, one thing was more fundamental and important than everything else: the growth of the church. He developed a whole set of strategies based on sociological argument and observation.

For example, McGavran argued that mission should focus on people or people groups who are responsive to the gospel, and not focus on those who are not. We can trace a clear line of thought from the Church Growth Movement in the 1970s and ‘80s, to church-planting movements in the ‘90s and 2000s, to disciple-making movements today.

A definition of the latter says, ‘Disciple making movements spread the gospel by making disciples who learn to obey the word of God and quickly make other disciples, who then repeat the process’. Notice the emphasis on scope and speed. Church-planting movements and disciple-making movements aim to reach as many people as possible, as quickly as possible.

The promise of these models is huge gospel growth. We are invited to return to the first years of the early church as its growth is described in Acts. This promise is supported by accounts of rapid multiplication of small churches and cells of believers in Asia, North India and across the Muslim world.

Now, let me outline three areas of concern.



Growth is the narrative of Western capitalism.... for the Western mission movement, the growth narrative is the air we breathe. We assume growth is an automatic good.



Biblical

When Luke records growth stories, it is striking that he always takes the same approach. He never says the *apostle* grew the church. Growth is recorded in one of two ways. Sometimes, Luke tells us, “the word of God increased and multiplied” or “the Lord added to their number daily”; on other occasions he uses the passive voice—“there were added” or “believers were added”.

Luke deliberately puts a degree of separation between church growth and human agency. The apostles proclaim, witness, strengthen, encourage. God is the one who grows his church.

A second question is whether growth is always God’s intention for his people. In Acts,

there seems to be an overall trajectory of growth, although it is sporadic and not linear. But when we read John's letters to the churches in Revelation, it is clear the Lord Jesus might act in judgement against a church. Maybe the Lord Jesus will bring the churches in Sardis and Laodicea to an end?

In the same way, it's obvious from the Old Testament that the nation of Israel experiences both great growth and terrible contraction. Growth is not necessarily the outcome God gives to his people.

Cultural

A second area of concern relates to secular culture. Growth is the narrative of Western capitalism. For a company to be successful, it needs to grow. This growth is measured in terms of speed and size. A successful company is one reaching ever more people, ever more quickly.

When churches buy into the growth narrative unreflectively, they risk exhausting their congregations and burning out their staff. For the Western mission movement, the growth narrative is the air we breathe. We assume growth is an automatic good. The mission world easily buys into this.

Practical

If we have swallowed the growth narrative of Western capitalism and believe growth is our responsibility as mission personnel, we face many challenges. The most obvious is to our transparency and integrity. There are many stories of gospel workers inflating the size and scope of their ministry to keep supporters on board. If we believe mission must be about growth, and we see no growth, we inevitably conclude that we are doing something wrong.

Perhaps a more insidious problem with the growth narrative is the temptation to instrumentalise relationships. Instead of seeing people for who they are—God's children, made in his image—we see them for the ministry potential they might offer us. Mr Maina stops being Mr Maina and starts being a potential convert, or a potential small-group leader. We want to be effective in ministry but we assume that we are only effective if things are growing.



When we recognise that the ultimate purpose of mission is God's glory, this brings the way we practise mission into focus.



So, how do we care about growth without making growth an ultimate good—that is, a good in its own right? I suggest one way is to define the goal or purpose of mission in relation to God. Rather than thinking mission is ultimately about the growth of the church, I suggest it is ultimately about the glory of God.

Mission for God's glory

In the book of Ezekiel, God works consistently to preserve the honour of his name. In the experience of the people of Israel, perhaps it felt as though God was changing his mind. However, Ezekiel makes it clear that this is not the case.

In the early chapters of the prophecy, God removes his presence from Jerusalem and reveals himself to Ezekiel in exile. The Lord withdraws from Jerusalem because the people who represent him are bringing his name into disgrace by worshipping idols within the temple.

Later in the book, foreign nations say the God of Israel has not been able to protect his people. So, God will restore Israel from exile—but for the sake of his holy name (Ezek 36:22-23). He has acted consistently for the sake of his glory.

We see this theme repeated over and over in the Bible. Our God is holy. He delights when his people reflect his love, justice and mercy but will separate himself from the profane. When his people rebel against him, he will act in judgment. We see God both engaging with and withdrawing from his people in the Old and New testaments.

When we recognise that the ultimate purpose of mission is God's glory, this brings the way we practise mission into focus. It is obvious that God is not glorified by dishonest, deceitful or manipulative activities. One of the problems with 'mission as growth' is that this distinction might become opaque. If growth is considered a good in its own right, then the way that growth happens might not matter much.

One of the problems with the Mars Hill Church in Seattle was that growth became an ultimate good. If you weren't on board the Mars Hill bus, then the bus ran you over. But, as we've seen, growth is not an ultimate good. And we know the New Testament cares a great deal about the way growth happens: "we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary..." (2 Cor 4:2).



If our desire in mission is to bring glory to God, what we do and how we do it must be God-glorifying. Mission as listening has lots of useful things to teach us—but God is not glorified if we only listen and never proclaim the gospel. Similarly, mission as growth has lots of useful things to teach us—but God is not glorified if we make growth an ultimate thing, or if we pursue growth in ungodly ways.

People who are engaging in mission in a way that glorifies God will be growing in godliness. Let me be clear what I mean by this. I'm saying that the way we proclaim the gospel should simultaneously grow us more like Christ. The way we do mission should grow our characters in godliness.

So, what does all this mean?

1. We need to remember the ultimate purpose of mission: to glorify God. Our heavenly Father wants to set apart a people for his own, a people marked out by their likeness to him. He is glorified as that happens. He is not glorified if those who profess his name are profaning him.
2. Mission is relational. Yes, some people come to faith in Christ by picking up a Bible and reading it. But most come to know Jesus through another person's engagement with them. Human relationships lie at the heart of the activities of mission. And the quality of those relationships, the attention that we give to them, is very important. In a technological age, we risk instrumentalising relationships. We risk turning relationships into tools we can use. Levers we can pull. But love does not do that.
3. Serving in mission grows us in godliness. If I am serving Jesus but growing bitter, getting angrier, becoming cynical, something is wrong. I need to serve in mission in a way that grows me in love, joy, peace, patience, etc.

If mission is ultimately about the glory of God, we will think carefully about what we do and how we do it. What we do must be shaped by God's glory, so we engage in the mission activities God commands us to practise, not because we ought to; not because it is our duty; not because we feel guilty; but because we delight in God. And how we engage in mission must also be God-glorifying. We will do God's work in God's way. **ACR**

This is an edited version of a talk from CMS Summer School in January 2024.

Local evangelism and global mission:

Maintaining focus on the ends of the earth

I remember the moment clearly. For several years my wife and I had been weighing up the prospect of vocational ministry. I loved opening the Bible with people and helping them to know Jesus better, but I felt inadequate for the task of pastoral ministry.

Our perspective changed when we received a prayer letter from friends who'd just arrived in a new country for their first term of missionary service with CMS. What struck me about their letter was not what I read, but what I saw: a photo of their young children perched on a pile of suitcases at a foreign luggage carousel. They'd packed their life into those suitcases and moved to a place where they had no language, no cultural experience, no friends, and no family. There were so many unknowns and so much weakness. Yet, there they were—for the sake of the gospel.

That snapshot of vulnerability gave me courage. It reminded me that God does not rely on human strength to achieve his purposes. Indeed, it is when I am weak that I am strong (2 Cor 12:10) and when he is most glorified. When we know that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (Rom 1:16), we can be confident that we are more equipped for the task of ministry than we can imagine. Carrying this treasure in jars of clay (2 Cor 4:7) is the way the Lord gives strength to his people (Psa 29:11).

This illustrates one small way that exposure to global mission can impact people in our



Scott Millar, Mission
Partnership Director, CMS
NSW & ACT.

churches and stir them to serve more courageously in our local context.

And our local context is in vital need of the gospel. We long for faithful Christians to joyfully proclaim the good news of Jesus in our streets, suburbs, states and territories. We long for Christ to be heard so he will be worshipped. We long for him to be worshipped so he will be heard.

With so much need locally, what place does global mission have in the life of the local church? With so many people from other nations migrating to our shores, why invest in overseas mission at all? Is the opportunity cost of sending scarce gospel resources out of Australia too high? Does our hunger to see tangible results in our own backyard weaken the business case for mission?

In our right desire to see fellow Australians come to know Jesus, we need to be wary not to neglect global mission. We need to continually consider both the distinction between global mission and local evangelism, and also how they relate. I propose we make a habit of asking ourselves not “Where does global mission fit in our church?” but “Where does our church fit in global mission?” I believe setting our ministries in this wider frame—starting with the ‘ends of the earth’ in mind—will help us strike the right balance and safeguard our churches from becoming introspective and self-serving.

Here are four reasons why this matters:



We can never be satisfied that we have loved enough. Love knows no limits and can be bounded by no geographical border.



1. A global mission framework aligns with God’s purposes and will

While mission is not a prominent activity of God’s people in the Old Testament, the trajectory of God’s will and the focus of his purpose is always towards the ends of the earth. We see this from the outset in the creation mandate to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). It is then reiterated to Noah after the flood (Gen 9:1) and enshrined for the ages in God’s promise to Abraham: “all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3).

From this foundation, the biblical history continually re-asserts the end towards which God is working (e.g. Psa 19:4; 47:7; 67:2; 1 Chr 16:23-24; Isa 2:3-4; Zech 9:10; Mal 1:11, 14). Although the nations stand in perpetual opposition to God’s people, the end game is summed up by Hezekiah’s prayer in 2 Kings 19:19: “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are God—you alone.”

The ‘kingdom of God’ thus becomes the construct for understanding the ‘end’ to which God is working. It is not a kingdom defined by geographical boundaries, political parochialism, or cultural branding. The hallmark characteristic of the kingdom is the revealed ‘glory of God’, which issues in God’s righteous rule being enjoyed and celebrated in all the world. As Isaiah 6 so majestically conveys: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

The whole earth is full of his glory.”

This trajectory traces into the New Testament where we see how God’s righteousness is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21). The kingdom he establishes is not defined by locality, but by faithful adherence to his word. Faith renders this righteousness accessible to people from every nation, tribe, people and language resulting ultimately in their united praise around the eternal throne of the Lamb (Rev 7:9-10).

When we set local ministry and evangelism within the framework of global mission in our church, we help people see the privileged place we hold within the eternal will of God. As we grow our engagement in global mission, we grow our alignment with God’s eternal purposes for the ends of the earth.

2. A global mission framework reflects the character of the early church

From the earliest days, local churches have demonstrated concern for the establishment and edification of God’s kingdom beyond their immediate proximity. The Ephesians and Colossians were renowned for their love for all the saints (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4); the Philippians’ *koinonia* in the gospel was praised and celebrated by Paul (Php 1:5); the generosity of the churches in Macedonia and Achaia towards the poor in Jerusalem earned Paul’s commendation and fuelled his encouragement of the Romans to act similarly towards the unreached in Spain (Rom 15:24-28). Paul’s various exhortations for churches in one location to pray for those in another demonstrates the biblically commended character of the early church: a deep concern for the gospel to take root and bear fruit both locally and abroad. Such was the culture-crossing nature of this radical new religion.

As we participate in global mission through prayerful and financial partnership, we continue this legacy in honour of the transcendent nature of Christ’s kingdom.

3. A global mission framework promotes loving fellowship with brothers and sisters across the world

In many respects this point is an extension of the last one. The driving reason for the early church’s generous behaviour had two prongs: hope and love. The eternal hope secured by Christ’s death and resurrection frees believers to no longer live for themselves but for the well-being of others. And even as Christians recognise the comprehensive, eternal and universal scope of Christ’s love for us, we can never be satisfied that we have loved enough. Love knows no limits and can be bounded by no geographical border.

Placing global mission in the foreground of our church thinking gives people a rich opportunity to express loving fellowship towards people in other parts of the world in a way that is both strange and unique in our world. When you pray for the work of a missionary, and when you pray for the people they are working alongside, you are expressing this fellowship in a way that helps others see our discipleship to Christ.

4. A global mission framework enriches local ministry

Put simply, if global mission is neglected in our local church, we deprive people of an opportunity to grow in and give expression to their Christian maturity.

Supporting my friends over the years has added depth to my walk with Christ. I have learned more about the challenges the gospel faces in another part of the world. I have gained a deeper appreciation for the nuances inherent in all cultures; nuances which can only be learned through experience, patient listening and (sometimes) mistakes! Often, I have been surprised by how barren the spiritual landscape is and delighted when I hear news of the gospel “breaking through”. These learnings have influenced my approach to local ministry situations, by giving me a more rounded perspective on the various ways God can work (i.e., my way isn’t the only way, nor is it always the best way!).

Above all, my eyes have been lifted to an ‘end of the earth’ that I previously had little or no concern for. I am thankful to God for alerting me to my ignorance in this regard. I am also thankful for how he has helped me to persevere and grow as a Christian through my (remote) experience of global mission.

Let us not deprive our churches of a rich opportunity to be encouraged by and become a part of the work God is doing to the ends of the earth.

At CMS NSW & ACT, we pray for three different link churches every morning. With about 400 link churches at the time of writing, this means we will likely be praying for your church every six months or so. Our regular prayer is that you will be constantly growing in your local gospel witness. We long for Jesus to be known locally. But we also pray that God would use your partnership in global mission to help grow your gospel maturity and to help you see how your partnership fits with the eternal plans of God in Christ, to the ends of the earth. **ACR**

Evangelism and garlic breath

Stef is a CMS missionary in Santiago, Chile with her husband Chris and three children. Raised in a Christian home, the gospel fell into place for her on a youth camp when she was 12. She gives her time to raising kids, discipling women and studying biblical counseling. She is a connoisseur of chocolate and an experienced op-shopper. Her favourite things about Chile are the dry heat of summer, snow on the Andes in winter and the way Chileans greet each other with a kiss on the cheek.



Stefanie Overhall, CMS
Missionary in Santiago, Chile.

I don't cook with garlic as often as I'd like. It's not because I don't like it; garlic is healthy and makes everything delicious! The reason I avoid it: garlic breath. I don't want to be worried about my breath while I'm chatting to someone and I don't want people to talk about me behind my back.

It's ridiculous really, but even such a small detail of my life reveals that I fear man. That's not to say that I'm *scared* of people, but I do care what they think. That I've been a missionary in Chile for 6 years doesn't change the fact that I want to be liked and respected. And I'm willing to sacrifice a garlicky stir fry on that altar. The problem is that I'm sacrificing other, much more important things to my fear of man. This is an article about evangelism after all.

If you're reading this, you have probably been on the receiving end of evangelism. You've heard the gospel of Jesus, been convicted of your sin, convinced of Christ's death for your forgiveness and have had the joy of entering new life with God. It was the best thing that ever happened to you! And like me, you were probably very excited to share this good news with your family and friends, to varying levels of success. Eventually you realised that many people aren't as excited about Jesus as you are and that things are less awkward if you keep quiet. You know you should evangelise, but the opportunity rarely seems to arise.

Ed Welch describes fear of man as caring more about what others think of us than what God thinks of us.²⁰ You can blame it on peer pressure, call it people-pleasing or being controlled by other people's expectations. It's so endemic that we hardly even notice it. Yet Jesus tells us,

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28).

The only treatment for fear of man is fear of God, humbly acknowledging that God is God and living to please Him. For me this is a daily process

of recognising my motives and repenting, pulling down idols and putting God back on the throne. Nowhere is this struggle more obvious than in my Christian witness (or lack thereof).

If I truly love God then I will want Him to be known and glorified. If I truly love my neighbour then I will desperately want him to be saved. Yet year after year I content myself with ministry within my family and church and fail to say enough so that my unbelieving friends can be saved.

Rico Tice reminds us that successful witnessing isn't someone becoming a Christian—it's someone hearing about Christ.²¹ God demands faithfulness, not results. After all, only the Holy Spirit softens hearts and opens blind eyes. My job is to unashamedly speak about Jesus, trusting that the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16).

So this year I hope to put evangelism (or people) back on the agenda. I don't think I'm going to become a gifted evangelist in a matter of months and I know there isn't any secret method to make evangelism less painful. My desire to talk about Jesus with unbelievers will always battle against my desire to be liked and comfortable. However, upon reflection there are some things I can do to be more intentional about sharing Jesus:

- **Pray** - I need to daily repent of fear of man and ask God to grow bigger and more glorious in my heart. I need to ask for opportunities and the boldness to take them.
- **People** - Most of my life operates within Christian community and I have often felt that I don't have any non-Christian contacts. However, in the process of writing this article I've been able to list at least 10 people with whom I interact quite regularly. I need to start praying that they will turn to Christ!



My desire to talk about Jesus with unbelievers will always battle against my desire to be liked and comfortable.



20 Welch, E. T. *When People Are Big and God Is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man*. Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2011, chapter 1.

21 Tice, Rico. *Honest Evangelism: How to talk about Jesus even when it's tough*. The Good Book Company, 2018, p 64.

- **Taking time** - while I'm quite invested in the lives of my Christian friends, to my shame I've hardly spared a thought for the 10 souls mentioned above. I may bump into them at church (there *are* unsaved people in churches) or at the school gate. But often I'm in such a rush that our conversations are fleeting. Am I able to slow down, in order to give them more of my time and attention? This won't happen by accident; I need to create a little more margin.
- **Listening** - our desire to speak doesn't mean that we shouldn't listen. I need to cultivate a genuine interest in people and draw them out. Perhaps in time I'll see more clearly how to share the gospel in a more personal way or see more obvious gospel connections.
- **Ask questions** - Rico Tice suggests 'pain-line questions' which push beyond the mundane into the spiritual.²² They will be painful for me because they force me to take the risk of offending someone. Questions that I could ask my friends include, 'You've told me that you attend church each week with your Christian wife. What's that like for you?'; 'You've told me that your kids are in a Christian school because you like the morality. Do you think there is anything/one behind those morals that makes them right?'; 'You mentioned that you used to go to church, do you mind my asking why you stopped?' Or even, 'Would you like to read the Bible with me?'

There's definitely a place for once-off evangelism, door knocking and gospel tracts. But in my life, evangelism will tend to be less an event and more a process. This process takes place within relationship and involves being a godly example and a good friend. Many conversations will take place; some may reference God, though many may not. But at some point, it will be necessary to speak the gospel fully enough that a person can be saved. At this point I will be the stench of death or the aroma life to my friend. But *my* confidence lies in the fact that to God I am the pleasing aroma of Christ (2 Cor 2:15-16). **ACR**

22 Tice, R. *Honest Evangelism*, p 15.



Book Review: *Honest Evangelism*

by Rico Tice

Do you find evangelism hard? Why is that the case when we have the best news to share?

Here lies a common tension—we *know* people need to hear about Jesus, yet all too often we hesitate to tell them about him. Maybe it's a fear of the consequences, that relationships might be broken, especially in a world that increasingly sees followers of Christ as the bearers of bad news rather than good. Or maybe this wasn't always the case, but weariness has set in from repeated rejection when we have shared.

Guilt then sets in as evangelism begins to feel like we're not doing enough. The temptation grows to pass it off as an optional extra for the lay Christian and reserved as work for the 'elite' (or paid) evangelist.

Rico Tice seeks to challenge all this in *Honest Evangelism* (The Good Book Company, 2015). Right off the bat, he acknowledges that even as someone paid to do so, he finds telling people about Jesus *hard*. Yet, even though the costs are high, we need to recognise the joys that are greater.



Sarah Chew is part of St Nicolas' Coogee and the Moore College community, where she's excitedly embarking on her final year of studies.

Tice does so by consistently pointing us back to the gospel, the good news about the love of Christ that we are to share, to compel our evangelism.

The book is nicely divided into two parts: the *Why* and the *How*.

In the first part, a key concept that Tice speaks of is ‘the pain line’: when we are hurt after getting hit (metaphorically) by rejection, that typically indicates something has gone wrong. Awareness of the pain line often leads to self-preservation kicking in so that we stay on the safe, comfortable side by *not* doing the thing that causes this hurt. In this case, it means we stop talking about Jesus.

Having laid out the very real stakes, Tice promptly counters with the biblical truths that keep him motivated to cross the pain line—the glory of Christ, the hope of new creation, and the reality of judgment, so that “we will want to witness because we will know that it is *always* worth it” (p 25). Ultimately, he reasons that the heart of any objection we can put forth lies in our *idolatrous hearts* that fail to love God first. Hence, we need to get our view of God right. By casting our eyes upward instead of inward, Tice encourages us to pray to the one who is sovereign, gracious, and powerful, who liberates the weak and trembling to witness:

*What is successful witnessing?
It’s not someone becoming
a Christian – it’s someone
hearing about Christ. It’s not
you winning the argument,
having all the answers, or
giving an eloquent speech – it’s
you preaching Christ’ (p 55).*

In the second part, hopefully after you’ve been convinced that we always need to evangelise, we get practical. How then do we rightly present the gospel to our audience?

Tice offers two tips to start: Ask them questions, and chat about your faith. And two exhortations: Be honest about the gospel and resist the urge to leave out parts that might trigger the pain line. Be yourself, resist the whispers of the devil that “*You’re not an evangelist*”. Tice insightfully observes that God has made us as we are (Psa 139:13-14), and placed certain people around us, so that the world might be reached. This leaves us without an excuse out of evangelism just because we are not “John Chapman/Helen Roseveare/my friend who seems to talk about Jesus naturally and compellingly with strangers on the bus” (p 74).



Tice manages to not just provoke thought, but also provide a way forward, all within a wonderfully concise 100 pages.



Wrapping up, Tice once again acknowledges the reality of challenges that we face in this day and age in bringing the Bible to people. This increases the need for us to be prayerful, patient and perseverant. Any competence in evangelism comes not through our own strength, but through practice. After all, “you don’t need to be good at witnessing; you simply need to be faithful in doing it” (p 93).

The message is simple but not simplistic—as those who are loved by Christ, any suffering is worth it to share him with so many who live in need, so keep at it. I greatly appreciated the perspective of this book, that the gospel is about God more than it is

about us; His glory is of greater importance than our suffering for the gospel, yet He is not detached, for Christ suffered to the point of death so that we have this amazing news to share.

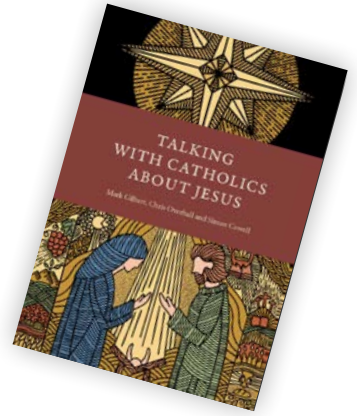
Tice manages to not just provoke thought, but also provide a way forward, all within a wonderfully concise 100 pages. This makes it a practical choice if reading is not your forte, as you could break the reading up into shorter blocks over a few days. Although each chapter is bite-sized, it is packed with material for deeper consideration, which could be used for a regular book club or discussion group.

If you ever needed a shot of encouragement to keep persevering at telling people about Jesus, *Honest Evangelism* does just that. **ACR**



An interview with the author

Talking with Catholics about Jesus by Mark Gilbert



There's a new course for small groups available from Matthias Media called Talking with Catholics about Jesus. The ACR interviewed one of the authors, Mark Gilbert. Mark works for Certainty4Eternity, an organisation established to help churches share the gospel with people from a Roman Catholic background.

ACR: Tell us a bit about yourself and your connection with Roman Catholics?

Mark Gilbert: I grew up in a loving Catholic family, attending Catholic primary and secondary schools, believing that Jesus was God. We went to Mass every week and I was involved in Catholic youth groups and social justice programs.

It wasn't till I went to university that I met Protestants and heard that Jesus had done everything to pay for my sin and all I needed to do was to trust him. I believed this because it was clear from the Bible. I joined a Protestant Bible study group but kept going to Mass on Sundays. I actually became more involved as a Catholic after

I heard and accepted the gospel. I did this for 7 years, going to Protestant Bible study during the week and Mass on Sundays till I started running a Bible study group in the Catholic church.

Three years after that, I left the Catholic Church and joined a university-based Anglican church.

ACR: Why do we need share the gospel with Catholics?

MG: We need to evangelise and disciple people from a Roman Catholic background because most aren't saved. They teach and believe a different gospel.

ACR: Why focus on sharing the gospel with Catholics in particular?

MG: Catholics still make up Australia's largest mostly unreached people group. They have a strong cultural identity and worldview, largely formed in their families and in the Catholic School system which still educates over a quarter of Australians.

Many Catholics will also choose to attend a Catholic university. Just these cultural distinctives effectively isolates them from Christians who might seek to share the gospel with them. Most Aussies don't go to a Catholic school as 80% of students in Catholic schools are from a Roman Catholic background. I worked out that during the 13 years I attended a Catholic school, I had over 1100 religious education lessons and attended Mass over 50 times, just at school. You cannot have that amount of input at such a formative time of life without it profoundly affecting your worldview and your understanding of yourself, God and the world around you.

ACR: What are the particular challenges in sharing the gospel with Catholics?

MG: I've already mentioned the isolation from Christians that the school system brings about. Other challenges include:

- An institutional view of religion that isolates many from our ministries because these ministries are not 'Catholic'. If our ministries are based on a 'come to us' model, then most Catholics won't come.
- A sacramental soteriology that gives them a confidence of salvation based on their baptism. This means they are often not interested in an evangelistic invitation.
- The visible institutional strength of the Catholic Church that makes an invitation to smaller, less impressive ministries less appealing.
- The fact that Roman Catholics are invisible to many of our ministries

because they look just like 'us'. We struggle to notice them, think about them, or pray for them.

I can list quite a few more, but they become obvious once you understand Roman Catholics better.



Mark Gilbert, Mark Gilbert works for Certainty4Eternity, helping churches share the gospel with people from a Roman Catholic background.

ACR: What particular opportunities do we have to share the gospel with Catholics?

MG: Whilst the task can seem daunting, our confidence in Catholic evangelism and discipleship rests on the truth that God loves them. We are commanded to be intentional in reaching all people groups, and God is more powerful and able than the Roman Catholic Church.

Particular ministries that have been successful in evangelising and discipling people from a Roman Catholic background are:

- **University ministries.** It is usually the first time Catholics and Christians meet and this curiosity from both sides leads

to lots of evangelistic opportunities. It worked for me!

- **Community chaplaincy.** This opportunity involves people who are identifiably Christian—that is, chaplains—going outside their churches and into various community groups where they are much more likely to encounter many people from a Roman Catholic background. There are a number of things that are distinctive about Roman Catholicism that makes this strategy work: Catholics have a high view of community and many want to be a part of a community, especially if they are drifting away from church; Catholics have a high view of good works so community groups that do good works are attractive; Catholics have a high view of chaplaincy and chaplains wear a less distinctive denominational badge, so institutional barriers are lower.

We need more!

ACR: *Why did you and your co-writers create the course *Talking with Catholics about Jesus*?*

MG: There was a need for it. When we run a course on Roman Catholicism in a church, it's usually the first time Christians have ever had explicit teaching on Roman Catholicism. Given that Catholics make up 25% of our mission field in Australia, and even more in many other parts of the world, many churches need this course. We can't visit every church, hence the course.

Many church leaders say that talking explicitly about Roman Catholicism on a

Sunday usually invites criticism. This course was designed to take the pressure off church leaders. It is promoted to and designed to be run in small groups, so the small group leader can say, "Do you guys want to learn more about Catholics so you can have great conversations with them about Jesus? Let's run this in our group".

ACR: *How would the course work in a church?*

MG: Every church is different, but we envision this being run mainly through small groups. There are 10 sessions in two parts: six on **understanding** Roman Catholicism and four on **practical** approaches to evangelism and discipleship. You can do either part first. We suggest doing one part during one term and the other part during a different term, even a year later, to revise and apply what you've learnt. You could also suggest individuals or leaders do the course. It would be a great idea to get your youth leaders and Bible study leaders to do this at some time, perhaps in their small groups. The level of the material is such that most church leaders would learn new and helpful things by doing this course.

ACR: *Thank you!*

Readers: please pray for this course, that God uses it to bring many people from a Roman Catholic background to know the assurance of salvation that is in Jesus Christ. **ACR**

The course is available from matthiasmedia.com.au or search for "Talking with Catholics About Jesus". Authors: Mark Gilbert, Simon Cowell, and Chris Overhall.

From the vault

John Chapman
thinks aloud about
evangelism

Evangelism: Explained

John Chapman thinks aloud

There is a famous definition of evangelism which the Archbishop's Committee gave on its report on the evangelistic work of the Church in 1918, in England.

"To evangelise", declared the Committee, "is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him to accept Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church."

It is a good definition. Canon John Chapman, Director of the Department of Evangelism in the Diocese of Sydney has a more concise one. "Evangelism", says John Chapman, "is to tell people the Gospel in its simplest form."

He believes that pre-evangelism is an important element. By "pre-evangelism" he means getting people ready to listen.

The Australian Church Record approached John Chapman for an overview on evangelism, particularly in the light of the imminent commencement of the rallies associated with "Connection 85" in the Warringah area.

It is hard to talk to or listen to John Chapman without becoming enthused by his enthusiasm for the Gospel. As a communicator and Bible teacher he ranks among the best. The Diocese of Sydney knows well that it has a gem in John Chapman. More importantly, he is a man with special gifts who has been set apart by God in a special way

everything that is the responsibility of a Christian is his, as well as his responsibility as a minister," he said.

"As well as teaching the members of the congregation the Gospel, the minister will by way of example show members how to evangelise."

"It is his job to see that people are trained for evangelism — this is part of godly living."

"I would expect him to offer important help in going about evangelism. If he does not have skills he must learn them or call in other people to help him. The minister must be seen to be part of any evangelistic programme," Mr. Chapman said.

He describes the minister as "a playing coach" — he coaches the team but plays himself as well. The term was borrowed from the Rev. Geoffrey Fletcher a former Director of the Department of Evangelism for whom John Chapman has an obvious warm admiration as evangelist and friend.

"It is possible that a minister, either through carelessness or forgetfulness might omit to teach his congregation unfortunatly, but it does not relieve the individual Christian from pursuing it."

"It will count for much on the Day of Judgement if we say to the Lord 'I didn't do it because my minister didn't teach me.'"

Chapman says that encouragement is important because he readily concedes that evangelism is hard work.

"We must teach people to make friends with people. Make sure that you are not so busy at church that you don't have time to make friends," he said.

As far as John Chapman is concerned, it doesn't make much difference where Christians take their opportunities for evangelism as long as they take them, whether it be at school, at home, in the

Greatest manpower resources

John Chapman sees great opportunities in ethnic evangelism in Sydney. He believes that in line with the command of Jesus to go to the uttermost parts of the earth, that the many migrants who have settled here are our immediate "Jerusalem".

Does he see any need for another Billy Graham type crusade in Sydney? "Whether we will ever run a city wide crusade again is problematical. It is increasingly difficult to know where to hold it."

"The business person has more free time at work than . . . at home, he should use that time"

"The demographic centre is now west of Parramatta. At the last crusade at Randwick Racecourse it was nearly impossible for people west of Parramatta to come and bring an outside friend. By the time they got home from work and had tea, it was too late. This is one reason why we have been running regional crusades and will continue to do so," he said.

If the media is to be used as a tool in evangelism, so be it, he says. Evangelism must not be thought of in a narrow framework.

"We must encourage people with skills in every direction."

John Chapman is firmly of the view that the best resource that the Christian church has in terms of evangelism is manpower.

"There is more manpower at our disposal than in any other voluntary organization in Australia. There are more people who go to church than any given



people who go to church every Sunday than any organization in Australia.”

“We should be training and using that resource,” he added.

John Chapman says that he “just happened” to concentrate upon evangelism in his overall ministry.

His impression of his 16 years in Sydney’s Department of Evangelism?

“It’s been great fun”, was his reply. In that case John has lots of good times still ahead of him because he has more regional crusades planned for at least the next three years.

FOOTNOTE: For those who do not know how John Chapman was converted, he tells it this way in “Know and Tell the Gospel:”

“I was led to Christ by the boy who sat next to me at high school . . . Although I was a regular churchgoer, it was apparent to him, as indeed it would have been to a casual observer, that I knew nothing about the Gospel.”

He begins his book with this illuminating anecdote:

“I remember going to a weekend conference some eighteen months after I was converted and a girl there asked me if I was a Christian. I answered “yes.”

“Tell me”, she said, “what have I to do to become a Christian”. I didn’t have the faintest idea where to begin. The incident left an indelible imprint on his memory.

workplace or wherever.

“The business person has more free time at work than he does at home, and he should use that time. You can talk to a person as easily at lunch time than you can after work.”

How is all that we know about evangelism affected by our belief in the sovereignty of God? We put that question to John Chapman.

“Belief in the sovereignty of God will give you confidence to know that God will call His own people back to Himself. Because God is sovereign, and because He longs for people to come back, you can engage in this work of evangelism knowing that you are not doing it on your own.”

“The reason we are telling the Gospel is because this is the way God converts people. Have a look at Romans 1:16. This is the way God does it.”

“That God will save the elect is a fact. How will God do it? Through the preaching of the Gospel and our prayers. We must not confuse our part with God’s part. If you try to do God’s part you will find it too hard. Election is entirely God’s business,” he said.

The truth is that the sovereignty of God undergirds evangelism. It upholds the evangelist by creating a hope of success that could not otherwise be entertained.

door to door witnessing with the result that both have experienced rapid growth.

“They keep growing because they keep meeting people and offer service to them,” he said.

“Contact is important, and there is a message for all Christians here,” he added.

Australian picture

John Chapman does not see much difference between evangelism strategy in Sydney Diocese and evangelism in Australia as a whole.

“The local Christians do it locally and so you keep on flowing resources to the local Christians”, he said.

The Department of Evangelism in Sydney frees John Chapman for six weeks a year to serve the wider Australian church outside of Sydney Diocese.

At the invitation of Canon Bernard Buckland, the Rector of Northampton he has just spent the last week in March in the Diocese of North West Australia conducting seminars on personal evangelism at Paraburdoo, Carnarvon and Northampton.

“My aim is to provide a stimulus for people to run their own training courses. Most parishes have the resources to train themselves,” he said.

This is a principle which John Chapman expounds in his book “Know and Tell the Gospel” — the why and how of evangelism.

He was a little reticent to talk about this but it is without doubt one of the most valuable available tools on evangelism.

“John Chapman’s book contains some of the important things which he has learned about evangelism, both from the Bible and in the crucible of experience” writes his Series Editor, Dr. Paul Barnett.

In his own Preface to the book, Chapman says: “Being engaged in evangelism is exciting, rewarding, the privilege and responsibility of every Christian. I did not always believe so, but have been convinced that this is the perspective of the Bible, and therefore of God.”

As the interview progressed, he returned to the role of Ministers.

“The Minister is firstly a Christian and



“The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. I think that part of our ministry in evangelism is to do that. It is to seek people who are outside and to urge them to come back into a relationship with God”, he said.

Two motives, two loves

There are two motives, he adds, that should spur Christians constantly to evangelise. The first is love for God and concern for His glory; the second is love for man and concern for his welfare.

The means vary from time to time, place to place, person to person.

“Evangelism is nearly as personal as your toothbrush,” he says with typical clarity.

“Some people find person to person relationships hard. Others find them a breeze.”

“The method has to be like the message so that there is no distinction between the way I bring the message and its content.”

“My life must reflect what I am saying,” he said.

No matter which evangelistic method is followed, John Chapman believes that there are four basic principles which should be involved. The principles may be turned into four questions:

- Will we actually contact unbelievers?
- Will the atmosphere be such that they will want to listen?
- Is the Gospel preached?
- Is it preached in a way that people can understand it?

“With these four principles kept in sight — go for it!” is John Chapman’s advice.

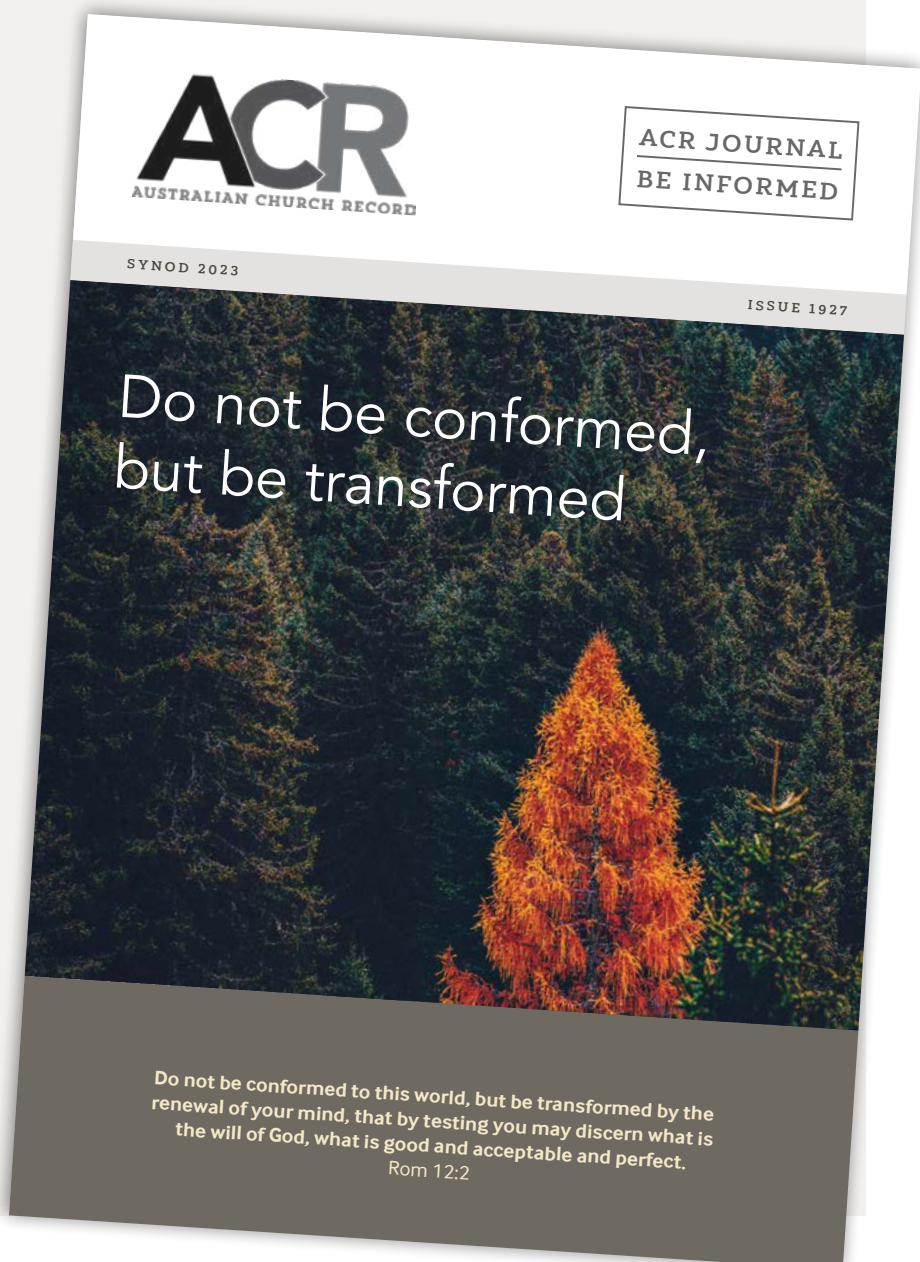
The strategic units

The Record asked whether there was an overall Diocesan strategy on evangelism.



John Chapman preaching at Prayer breakfast

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