

Australian Reenvisioning of Theological Education: In Step with the Spirit?

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Abstract

There is a growing interest in local churches reshaping themselves around mission and developing an everyday theology for the marketplace, but what does this mean for theological education and leadership formation? How do we keep in step with the Spirit and help our students practice consecration through the Spirit? This paper grapples with these questions by drawing on three Australian writers; marketplace theologian Robert Banks, missional church leaders Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, and Australian poet and artist Michael Leunig. It presents innovative approaches to training at Australian colleges and training providers including Tabor College Victoria, Forge Mission Training Network and Whitley College, and discusses implications for the future of theological education in step with the Spirit. To be in step with the missionary Spirit will include reenvisioning our approach to vocation and the ministry of the whole people of God, recalibrating our churches around mission and recentring with contemplation and engaging our cultural contexts.

Ode to formative teachers

Three stories have captured my imagination and helped form my vision for transformative theological education and leadership formation.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks sat in the front white section of a bus. She stood up for equal rights by sitting down, initiating the Montgomery bus boycott and catalysing the civil rights movement that transformed the United States. The sanitised version of her protest is that she was 'just tired'. But this fails to recognise she had been active in the movement for justice and was most tired of her people being treated unequally. And earlier that year she attended a workshop at the 'Highlander Centre', a training centre for community workers and advocacy. At Highlander she acquired skills, but perhaps most importantly said it was where she first experienced "an atmosphere of equality with members of the other race".¹ I applaud Rosa Parks' initiative on the Montgomery bus. But as a teacher I am equally inspired by the training that equipped her and gave her a vision to transform her world. Rosa Parks' experience prompts me to ask how can we help our students be equipped and courageous to transform the world to be more in line with God's dream for it?

The second story is of Dr Gilbert Bilezikian. If you do not know Bilezikian, you probably know of one of his students, Bill Hybels, founding pastor of Willow Creek. Hybels pioneered the concept of "seeker-sensitive services" and is widely-respected for helping church leaders around the world do church in new ways. What captures my imagination is not just Hybels' leadership but the formative input of Dr Bilezikian as his lecturer at Trinity College in Illinois. Hybels recalls Dr Bilezikian's inspirational teaching about the New Testament church:

"I don't see many churches like this in America in the '70s. I mean, I see buildings and I see programs, I see budgets and I see a lot of activities. ... I just don't see the life of what the Scriptures is talking about. I don't see that kind of life being breathed out in a vital way ... Someday the mold will be broken. Somebody will get serious about doing church God's way and they're gonna take all the risks and endure all the attacks. Someday, somebody will start a church, and it will be a lot like this: it will rock the world."²

Thus impressionable young Hybels was inspired. I applaud what Hybels has done for his context and generation. But I am equally inspired by the mentor in Bilezikian that sparked Hybels' vision. It prompts me to ask how can we help our people to dream and work with God to transform the church in our different contexts?

¹ Research and Education Centre Highlander, "A Tribute to Rosa Parks," <http://www.highlandercenter.org/n-rosa-parks.asp>; Darren Cronshaw, "Baptist Union of Victoria Leadership Training Inspiring Stories," (2008), <http://www.buv.com.au/ministries/leadership-training/>; Darren Cronshaw, "Reenvisioning Theological Education, Vocation and the Kingdom of God," *Crucible* (Submitted for 2011).

² Gregory A Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 44-45; also told for BUV, accessible at <http://www.buv.com.au/ministries/leadership-training/>

The third story is of George Buttrick, a respected preacher at Madison Avenue Presbyterian who also took a mentoring interest in young developing ministers.³ Early in Eugene Peterson's training he took a staff role at Buttrick's church, actually while Peterson was planning an academic career but needing to fulfil fieldwork requirements and pay his way through seminary. But the appointment was dangerous to his plans because Buttrick taught Peterson the craft of pastoring. He would take Peterson and other seminarians to his home after each evening service, and talk about preaching, visiting, attitudes to people and commitment to the neighbourhood. He poured his heart and life not just into his own ministry but into multiplying himself through others. Eugene Peterson is my literary mentor as a pastor/ scholar/ writer/ teacher. But I am also inspired by George Buttrick who helped form Peterson's pastoral vocation. It challenges me to ask how can we work with God to reenvision and transform people's understanding of their self and their vocation?

Australian writers and case studies

Those are three inspiring heroes of mine, and the schools, teachers and places of practical experience which helped train them in North America. But I grapple with how to reenvision theological education and leadership formation in Australia. I have been watching the groundswell of interest in churches reshaping around mission and everyday spirituality, but I am curious what does this mean for our teaching? How can we keep in step with the Spirit and help our students practice consecration through the Spirit? This paper grapples with these questions by drawing on four Australian writers; marketplace theologian Robert Banks and his book *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, missional church leaders Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, and Australian poet and artist Michael Leunig and his playful contemplative prayers. It presents case studies of training at Tabor College Victoria, Forge Mission Training Network and Whitley College, pairing them with the literary inspiration of Banks, Hirsch and Frost, and Leunig, and discusses implications for the future of theological education in step with the Spirit.⁴

In step with the missionary Spirit

For theological education to be in step with the Spirit, we must acknowledge foundationally that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of mission who sends the church into the world. *Missio Dei*, the "mission of God" or "the missionary God", was arguably the most important theological rediscovery of the twentieth century. It reminds us the church does not own its mission program but our God of mission birthed the church to help fulfil God's mission.⁵ David Bosch expresses *missio Dei* as central for the emerging paradigm of mission:

³ Eugene H Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 85-87.

⁴ This article partly draws and builds on two previous articles: Darren Cronshaw, "Reenvisioning Theological Education, Mission and the Local Church," *Mission Studies* 28, no. 1; May (2011): 91-115; Cronshaw, "Reenvisioning Theological Education, Vocation and the Kingdom of God."

⁵ Moltmann expressed: "it is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church" Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 64.

Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God ... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world ... a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission ... There is a church because there is a mission, not vice versa.⁶

As churches and as arms of the church providing theological education, if we want to be in step with the Spirit, then we want to be part of this Trinitarian movement of being *sent* into the world. We can be confident that the Spirit goes before us; the invitation is to be in step with the Spirit. So to what extent are experiments in Australian reenvisioning of theological education in step with the missionary Spirit?

A. Tabor College Victoria and Robert Banks' *Reenvisioning*

Robert Banks, a leading Australian theologian, has appealed for theological education to be reenvisioned with a distinctly missional focus, in his book *Reenvisioning Theological Education*.⁷ If we want to help our students to be part of the missional movement of the Spirit sending the church into the world, then we need to embody this in our educational processes. Over recent decades theological educators have debated whether we belong in “Athens”, with a focus on character development, or “Berlin”, with focus on vocational skills.⁸ Banks’ alternative is to start in “Jerusalem” with what he calls a missional synthesis. By that he means that the best education and formation will be at least partly field-based and stretch students to *do* what they are studying. Classes are not for students to collect abstract learning for future ministry, but in-service equipping for a more faithful expression of current mission. Banks argues theological education and leadership formation happens best when theory and practice, action and reflection are combined. It is not just about bringing theory to practice or doing action *then* reflection, but learning in the midst of mission or “reflection-in-action”.⁹ And this is needed not just for professional clergy. Banks argues we need training that is far more field-based, encompassing all-of-life and addressing mission opportunities for the whole people of God: “an education undertaken with a view to what God is doing in the world, considered from a global perspective”.¹⁰

This missional agenda in training – forming students who can keep in step with what the Spirit is doing in the world – is central to reenvisioning theological education. How can colleges empower the whole people of God to discover and live out their

⁶ David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 390. I explored the influence of *missio Dei* on emerging missional churches in Darren Cronshaw, *The Shaping of Things Now: Emerging Church Mission and Innovation in 21st Century Melbourne* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009), 39-40, 100-51.

⁷ Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).; reviewed in Darren Cronshaw, “Pioneering Leadership and Innovation Reading Guide,” *Zadok Papers* (2011), 10, 9-16. and discussed in Cronshaw, “Reenvisioning Theological Education, Vocation and the Kingdom of God.”

⁸ David H Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

⁹ Donald A Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic, 1983), 68.; in Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 139.

¹⁰ Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 142.

callings – in the church but also in society and the marketplace? God calls people not just for religious vocations but for vocations in science, business and education. We want to help God’s people to be in step with the Spirit in the church, but also in politics and health, parenting and recreation, media and finance. In Australia only about 20% of 14,000 students in 69 theological colleges are preparing for professional ministry. The missional and vocational challenge is for colleges to equip not just those preparing to serve *in* the church, but those called to serve *as* the church in the world.¹¹ It’s about forming a new generation of church leaders, like Bill Hybels and Eugene Peterson, who transform the church, but also civic leaders and activists like Rosa Parks who transform the world.

Tabor

One Australian college that is grappling with training the whole people of God for their vocations in the world is Tabor College Victoria.¹² Tabor started in Adelaide in 1979 and Melbourne in 1988 as a Pentecostal ministry college, but now draws from a wide range of churches and offers a broad offering of courses to 500+ students.¹³ As well as theological, ministry and mission streams and counselling courses, they have recently developed programs in education and the arts for teacher training and a unique Master of Arts in Vocational Practice (MAVP) for church leaders, development workers and soon health, media and business leaders.¹⁴ Principal Wynand De Kock says “Tabor wants to be a comprehensive Christian college that equips men and women to respond to the call of God wherever the voice of God calls them to.”¹⁵ Tabor’s mission is “to empower God’s people to transform the world”.

Foundational to Tabor’s vision is the importance of vocation. “Vocation” is derived from *vocare*, Latin for voice, because vocation relates to hearing the voice of God about how God has made and called us to contribute to the world. De Kock suggests a basic characteristic of followers of Jesus, as sheep who know the shepherd’s voice (John 10:27), is that they follow his voice into any sphere of life in the world.¹⁶ He suggests the beauty of identifying and understanding vocation is that it reminds the people of God that they are called and drawn to work with God where God is already working, not just in church but in the broader world.¹⁷

De Kock is influenced by Parker Palmer, who invites people to develop their vocation not from what they or others think they *ought* to do, but from discerning how God has made them and what passions God has given them. Palmer quotes Frederick Buechner who defines vocation as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep

¹¹ Charles Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology: The Depth, Reach and Utility of Australian Theological Education* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009), 111-12.

¹² Drawing on my previous treatment of Tabor and vocation in Cronshaw, “Reenvisioning Theological Education, Vocation and the Kingdom of God.”

¹³ Wynand de Kock, Interview with author (18 Jan 2011); “Tabor – Brief History”, accessible at <http://www.tabor.vic.edu.au/about/history>.

¹⁴ <http://www.tabor.vic.edu.au/study/ma/church-practice>.

¹⁵ De Kock, Interview.

¹⁶ De Kock, Interview.

¹⁷ De Kock, Interview.

need.”¹⁸ This is a good framework for forming leaders – helping them to discern vocational directions that are life-giving both for them (in terms of their passions) and for the world (in terms of meeting real needs). For example and relevant for us as teachers, Palmer’s own sense of vocation is clearly as a master-teacher: ‘I had never stopped being a teacher ... In fact, I could have done no other: teaching, I was coming to understand, is my native way of being in the world. Make me a cleric or a CEO, a poet or a politico, and teaching is what I will do’ (p.21). For those of us who are teachers and if that is where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need, then let us pursue that with passion. For those in our classes whose vocation lies elsewhere, let us help them explore the “big questions and worthy dreams” of their vocation.¹⁹

Consecration through the Spirit to Vocation

Banks, Palmer and Tabor remind me that consecration through the Spirit includes commitment to identifying and developing our vocation and the vocations of our students. We need fresh approaches to training and curriculum reform that take seriously people’s diverse vocations. Traditional theological education, shaped around preparing church leaders, is not sufficient. We need fresh approaches to training, developed by and with Christian leaders in all spheres, to help leaders grapple theologically with issues of economics and politics, ethics and workaholism, multiculturalism and globalisation.²⁰ It is appropriate to channel our best thinking into how faith engages with the marketplace. We need foundational frameworks for understanding the Bible and church history, but also skills and practice in making the connections between theology and everyday life and work. God is a worker, as Banks describes in another of his classic books, and our vocation as the people of God is to apprentice with God in what God is working in the world.²¹

The Spirit and transformation

De Kock argues that consecration through the Spirit is largely to help believers love and be involved in social change including multicultural inclusion. This is part of the charismatic tradition of Tabor wants to claim – charismatic empowering for personal and social transformation. Rather than being preoccupied with gifts of the Holy Spirit, De Kock looks for fruit and missional implications. “The Spirit empowers God’s people for mission” is the central charismatic truth they want students to grasp. This has implications for multicultural ministry. The Azusa Street revival, where modern Pentecostalism started at the beginning of the twentieth century, had a black

¹⁸ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological A-Z* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 95; Parker J Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 16; discussed in Darren Cronshaw, “Confessions of an Angry Missionary,” *Mission Horizons: Newsletter of the School of World Mission* 22(2006): 3.

¹⁹ Parker J Palmer, Arthur Zajonc, and with Megan Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal, Transforming the Academy through Collegial Conversations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

²⁰ Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 185-86; see also Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens, eds., *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity; an A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997).

²¹ Robert Banks, *God the Worker: Journeys into the Mind, Heart and Imagination of God* (Sydney: Albatross, 1992); Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 177-200; discussed in Cronshaw, *Shaping of Things Now*, 235.

evangelist and one account is that it was a little black girl who spoke in tongues. De Kock says that is a true sign of Spirit baptism that injustice and racial divides disappeared as in Acts 2.²²

This section leads me to ask what does consecration through the Spirit mean in terms of our vocations? At our best in theological education, how do we engage the whole people of God in their vocations? What does it mean to reenvision theological education around the vocation of the whole people of God?

B. Frost & Hirsch's *Shaping and Forge*

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch

Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, leading Australian missional thinkers and activists, have appealed for an overhaul of church and training around mission. In *Shaping of Things to Come* they appeal to the church in the West to be more 'incarnational' in infiltrating our communities for the gospel (rather than waiting for people to come to church); 'messianic' in recognising the relevance of Jesus as Lord for all of life (rather than the dualistic tendency of separating sacred and secular concerns); and 'apostolic' in affirming the pioneering/ generative roles of leaders who are gifted apostolically, prophetically and evangelistically (not just the operative roles of pastors and teachers).²³ In their later books like *The Forgotten Ways* and *Exiles* they urge recalibrating around a fresh understanding of Jesus, reprioritising discipleship, decentralising organic systems that release people's innovative capacities, letting 'communitas' evolve as groups engage in adventurous mission together, and focusing on apostolic movement and mobilising everyone for mission.²⁴ Their main contribution to our theological education conversation is to catalyse our conversation around missional training.²⁵

Forge Mission Training Network

Hirsch and Frost co-founded Forge in 1996 as a mission training network to form two things: missionary identity and pioneering leadership skills. Other colleges offered

²² De Kock, Interview; see also the volume edited by Tabor's Cheryl Catford, *Following Fire: How the Spirit Leads Us to Fight Injustice* (Springvale: Urban Neighbours of Hope, 2008).

²³ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003).; discussed in Cronshaw, *Shaping of Things Now*, 36-69.

²⁴ Frost, *Exiles*; Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 24-25; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009); Alan Hirsch and Darryn Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook to a Revolution: A Guide to Mission-Incarnational Practice* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009); Alan Hirsch and Debra Hirsch, *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books/ Shapevine, 2010); Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Faith of Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure & Courage* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). <http://www.theforgottenways.org/>.

²⁵ Hirsch says 'A catalyst inspires people to connect and talk about things that matter. In a ministry sense, catalysts facilitate discussion and dreaming around participating in God's missionary endeavour.' Hirsch and Altclass, *TFW Handbook*, 134.

sufficient training for pastors and teachers, they felt, but they wanted Forge to multiply apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic leaders who can take risks, question the status quo, communicate relevantly and pioneer new initiatives.²⁶ So they designed an action-reflection program that placed interns in an incarnational mission context that stretched them out of their comfort zone. They were supported with monthly coaching and peer clusters to reflect on what they were experiencing in mission, and three teaching intensives with inspirational mission practitioners. It is a 'reflection-in-action' experience²⁷, and focused on acting into new ways of thinking rather than expecting students to think into new ways of acting.²⁸

A third of interns did Forge for accredited study with a partnering college (including Tabor and Whitley), but most were attracted just for the value of the inspiration and networks. Forge has given hundreds of interns and students exposure to ministry among the poor, new paradigms for mission, disciplines for sustainability in mission, and skills in cultural analysis and understanding consumerism. Often what interns most appreciated was hearing stories of imaginative new expressions of mission and seeing it in action, and having the space to dream and implement their own passions. Forge has had to scale down Australian operations in recent years, even as it has been spreading in others parts of the world. And there is a need to evaluate the results of Forge's training and the sustainability of its church plants. But the mission of Forge remains: "to help birth and nurture the missional church in Australia and beyond".²⁹

Consecration through the Spirit to mission

Frost, Hirsch and Forge's legacy reminds me how revolutionary it is to understand that God is *missio Dei* "a missionary God" and the Spirit is a missionary Spirit, who sends and invites God's people to join God in mission. To be in step with the Spirit in theological education includes helping our students realise their identity as missionaries. It will fuel an entrepreneurial, pioneering spirit to join with what God is doing in the world. Lesslie Newbigin appealed for distinctly missional leadership formation: "Ministerial training as currently conceived is still far too much training for the pastoral care of the existing congregation, and far too little oriented toward the missionary calling to claim the whole of public life for Christ and his kingdom."³⁰ Frost and Hirsch are among those inspired by Newbigin who are calling for a recalibration of the church in the West around mission. Instead of starting with an assumed and inherited picture of church, they ask what would be the shaping of church if we centred on mission, and formed our understanding of mission around Christ? So the ordering is "Jesus → Mission → Church".³¹ The training challenge is to help our students have their imagination captured by a fresh encounter and

²⁶ Drawing on Ephesians 4:11; Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things to Come*, 165-81, 218-23.; discussed in Cronshaw, *Shaping of Things Now*, 66-68, 198-203. This section draws on my previous treatment of Forge in Cronshaw, "Reenvisioning Theological Education, Vocation and the Kingdom of God."

²⁷ Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 147.

²⁸ Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 120-24; drawing on Richard T Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business* (New York: Crown, 2000), 14.

²⁹ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things to Come*, 219.

³⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 231.

³¹ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things to Come*, 16, 209.

understanding of Jesus, in order to shape their understanding of mission, and to let their understanding of mission shape how they lead the church.

Furthermore, what would be the shape of our mission if we shaped it around a renewed Trinitarian understanding of God? There are two streams of how Trinitarian theology can help us understand what it means to be in step with the Spirit in mission and theological education.³² Firstly, there is a Trinitarian *sending* work of God: the Father sending the Son, Father and the Son sending the Spirit, the Trinitarian godhead sending the church.³³ Part of the good news of the Trinitarian God sending us into the world is that the Spirit goes before us. Newbigin explains: “the Spirit who thus bears witness in the life of the Church to the purpose of the Father is not confined within the limits of the Church. It is the clear teaching of the Acts of the Apostles, as it is the experience of missionaries, that the Spirit goes, so to speak, ahead of the Church.”³⁴ Frost and Hirsch encourage Christians to adopt a spirituality of engagement, based on the understanding that God goes ahead of us into even so-called secular areas and sends us there to discern and join what God is doing.³⁵

The other Trinitarian stream that shapes mission and potentially reenvisioning theological education is social trinitarianism: the interrelatedness and interdependence of three persons in the Godhead and how this reality is reflected in the church.³⁶ God in three persons models social life and invites people into the life and community of God, or more poetically the *perichoresis*; the movement or dance of God.³⁷ Not only does God send the people of God into the world, but God who is already active in the world invites us to join how God is moving, creating and dancing in the world. The church as a community-in-mission mirrors the overflowing self-giving community of Trinitarian life.³⁸ Forge has focused more on understanding *missio Dei* and the centrality of Jesus in the gospels as inspiration for mission.³⁹ But social trinitarianism richly inspires our mission and theological education to be in step with God – Father,

³² Stephen B Bevens and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 286-304; Craig Van Gelder, “How Missiology Can Help Inform the Conversation About the Missional Church in Context” in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 28-30, 12-43.

³³ David Bosch, *Mission to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 390.

³⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Faith for Today's Mission* (Richmond: John Knox, 1964), 49.

³⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things to Come*, 95-133; Frost, *Exiles*, 142.

³⁶ John D Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1985); trinitarian perspectives previously discussed in Cronshaw, *Shaping of Things Now*, 61-62.

³⁷ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 272; Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); popularised at Tabor by C Baxter Kruger, *The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited* (Blackwood: Perichoresis, 2002).

³⁸ Bevens and Schroeder, *Constants*, 287.

³⁹ Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 180-81; Frost, *Exiles*, 146-47; Michael Frost, “In a League of Their Own? An Examination and Assessment of the Claims and Practice of the Emerging Church in Australia” (DMin thesis, Australian College of Theology, 2008), 45-50, 93; cf. Gary M Simpson, “A Reformation Is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A Promising Theology for an Emerging Missional Church,” in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 75-83, 65-93.

Son and Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a spirit of creativity and of mission; to experience consecration through the Spirit is intrinsically missional.

The early church realised their need to be in step and filled with the Spirit in order to fulfil the mission of God (Acts 1-2). Jesus himself modelled consecration through the Spirit and living its missional implications (from the passage the Baptist World Alliance grappled with in Hawaii in 2011; Luke 4:18-19). Forge writers acknowledge that the missional church movement and its training has not learned as much as they could from the charismatic and Pentecostal traditions. Hirsch comments, 'What is still largely missing from this emergent phenomenon is any sustained and explicit Pentecostal presence, with all its fire and passion'.⁴⁰ On the other hand, charismatic and Pentecostal interest in the Spirit has not always been missional at its heart.⁴¹

This section leads me to ask what does consecration through the Spirit mean in terms of our mission? At our best, what does it mean to reenvision theological education around missional church, and for missional church to experience consecration through the Spirit?

C. Whitley College and Michael Leunig's playful contemplative prayers.

Michael Leunig

Michael Leunig is Australia's most popular contemporary poet and artist. His work, though not explicitly Christian, combines prophetic challenge, spiritual dimension and humorous asides. Outside the Bible, his work would be the most quoted by the worship leaders in my local church. People love the way he weaves words and comic art to invite us to contemplate the importance of relationships and nature, prayer and solitude, recreation and justice. Leunig's cartoons appear regularly in daily newspapers in Melbourne, often commenting on political and social issues, but also showing astute understanding of the pressures of suburbia and modern lifestyles. Like the best of Christian mystics, Leunig values space for contemplation but also courage for prophetic social engagement. In his booklet, *When I Talk to You: A Cartoonist Talks to God*, he includes a prayer that treasures 'places of simplicity and peace' and how cultivating our inner lives can help us transform the world:

Dear God,
We give thanks for places of simplicity and peace.
Let us find such a place within ourselves.
We give thanks for places of refuge and beauty.
Let us find such a place within ourselves.
We give thanks for places of nature's truth and freedom,
of joy, inspiration and renewal,
places where all creatures may find acceptance and belonging.
Let us search for these places: in the world, in ourselves and in others.

⁴⁰ Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 271; cf. Michael Frost, "Towards a Missional Perspective on the Holy Spirit", in Cheryl Catford (ed), *Following Fire: How the Spirit Leads Us to Fight Injustice*, (Melbourne: UNOH, 2008), 33-41.

⁴¹ Cheryl Catford, ed. *Following Fire: How the Spirit Leads Us to Fight Injustice* (Melbourne: UNOH, 2008).

Let us restore them.
Let us strengthen and protect them and let us create them.
May we mend this outer world according to the truth of our inner life
and may our souls be shaped and nourished by nature's eternal wisdom.⁴²

Leunig is committed to addressing issues of the world but also cultivating the soul; to be contemplative in the interest of personal and social change:

God help us to change.
To change ourselves and to change our world.
To know the need for it.
To deal with the pain of it.
To feel the joy of it.
To undertake the journey without understanding the destination.
The art of gentle revolution. Amen.⁴³

Although he does not capture the fullness of the gospel, Leunig is a source of inspiration for me to be in step with the Spirit; to be open to change and repentance and join with God's "art of gentle revolution" that we understand as the kingdom of God. He models an acute attentiveness to my cultural context, a willingness to engage courageously with its big social and political and lifestyle issues, and a commitment to slowing down and finding contemplative space in the midst of life's challenges.

Whitley College

The place that has most taught me and embodied for me a commitment to both context and contemplation is Whitley College, the Baptist Theological College of Victoria. In 2010 they had 353 students (98 EFTS), including 90 TransFormation students, an innovative program for culturally and linguistically diverse students.⁴⁴ With a vision for "equipping leaders for a different world", they have recently overhauled their whole curriculum and college life.⁴⁵ But attention to our Australian cultural contexts remains an important aspect of teaching across the curriculum.

Whitley's Principal Frank Rees encourages exploration of what it means to be Christian and church in the unique context of Australia, and to reflect theologically on this in conversation with Australian cultural forms:

We need not only a quest for an Australian spirituality but an Australian theology ... images, metaphors and stories to name God in new ways, Australian ways. ... We need to sift through our literature, films and

⁴² Michael Leunig, *When I Talk to You: A Cartoonist Talks to God* (Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins, 2004). My italics.

⁴³ Michael Leunig, *Common Prayer Collection* (North Blackburn: HarperCollins, 1993). I discuss these prayers and other aspects of Leunig in Darren Cronshaw, *Credible Witness: Companions, Prophets, Hosts and Other Australian Mission Models* (Melbourne: Urban Neighbours of Hope, 2006), 32-37.

⁴⁴ Cf. Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology*, 133.

⁴⁵ Ross Langmead, "Report on Whitley's Directions" (Unpublished paper, 19 June 2010).; "Whitley College Undergraduate Information" (2010), <http://whitley.unimelb.edu.au/theological-school/handbooks-2010>.

music, our ways of living and working and playing, to find new ways of understanding and being church.⁴⁶

Rees' 'conversational' method of contextual theology invites culture and experience as theological sources alongside and in conversation with Scripture and tradition.⁴⁷ Whitley offers a number of units on mission in Australian contexts but also grapples with contemporary cultural challenges across the curriculum – Charles Sherlock suggests Whitley offers the most integrated contextual approach of any Australian college.⁴⁸ Dean of the Theological School and Missiology Professor, Ross Langmead, teaches on mission in the Australian context.⁴⁹ Hebrew Bible Professor Mark Brett teaches insights that biblical scholars could learn from Aboriginal perspectives on the land and oral traditions.⁵⁰ And a unit on specifically Australian contextual theology is titled 'Curly Flat Theology', referring to the imaginary land 'Curly Flat' where Leunig places some of his characters who reflect on what is most important in life. Whitley's syllabus assumes we can be faithful to Scripture and integrally engaged with our cultural contexts; indeed, being in step with the missionary Spirit demands it.⁵¹

A second key element of Whitley's ethos is contemplation. We need to know our world (with contextual awareness) but we also need to know our God and our selves (through contemplative prayer and formation). Our colleges and processes for leadership formation need to rigorously engage the academy but also, as Henri Nouwen suggests, need to reclaim the place of the monastery and silence to cultivate communion with God.⁵² As part of formation, Langmead teaches the importance of guarding space for contemplation. As an activist for mission and justice he is engaged with difficult issues that need transformation, but warns:

If mission were all action, with no reflection, we would go off the rails. We would 'hard sell' the gospel, organise our way to being an international brand name, manage the church and cram every living moment with mission activity. But it's mission with mystery, and waiting is as important as outreach, listening as speaking, responding as pro-active planning. The reflective and meditative dimension of mission is central.⁵³

Whitley does not teach that contemplation is separate from but engaged with everyday life and ministry. But they also offer a range of subjects on Spirituality, Vocation and

⁴⁶ Frank Rees, "Oz Church Goes to Kinder," *St Mark's Review* (1999): 21, 21-26.

⁴⁷ Frank Rees, "Beating around in the Bush: Methodological Directions for Australian Theology," *Pacifica* 10, no. 3 (2002): 285-86, 66-93.

⁴⁸ Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology*, 115, cf. 208, 44-45.

⁴⁹ Ross Langmead, *Re-Imagining God and Mission: Perspectives from Australia* (Adelaide: Australian Theological Forum, 2007).

⁵⁰ Mark Brett, "Feeling for Country: Interpreting the Old Testament in the Australian Context", *Pacifica* 23 (June 2010): 145, 137-156.

⁵¹ Cronshaw, *Credible Witness*, 8, 160-75.

⁵² Henri J Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 46-48.; see also Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 162-63.

⁵³ Ross Langmead, "Theological Reflection in Ministry and Mission," *Ministry Society and Theology* 18(2004): 25-26; drawing on Donald E Messer, *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

Community, Experiencing God, Patterns in the Practice of Christianity, Table Spirituality, Spirituality of Everyday Life, Contemporary Spiritual Writers and Spirituality Beyond Consumerism. A highlight of my studies at Whitley was practising new spiritual disciplines together with a small class, and my teacher Jill Manton challenging me towards deeper contemplation and reflection and not just rushing to finish an assignment. A highlight of my teaching at Whitley is seeing students discerning their vocation and exercising spiritual practices for their assignments. It is easy for students to prefer intellectually focused book reviews and essays, but a well crafted practical assignment can help students learn to contemplate deeply and *practise* consecration through the Spirit.

This section leads me to ask what does it mean to be consecrated to the Spirit in terms of contextualisation and contemplation? At our best in theological education, how can we help students to be consecrated to the Spirit in their cultural engagement and in their contemplative prayer? What does it mean to reenvision theological education around our contexts and our calling to be prayerful?

What is the path to being in step with the Spirit and practising consecration through the Spirit in our leadership formation and theological education? This paper has suggested part of the answer is in reenvisioning our approach to vocation and the ministry of the whole people of God (inspired by Banks and Tabor), recalibrating our churches around mission (inspired by Forge) and recentring with contemplation and seriously engaging our contexts (inspired by Leunig and Whitley).

Benediction

Grappling with this common project and calling, and trusting that we all have ideas to take away from this week, I resonate with another of Leunig's prayers that is appropriate to finish with:

God help us with ideas, those thoughts which inform the way we live and the things we do. Let us not seize upon ideas, neither shall we hunt them down nor steal them away. Rather let us wait faithfully for them to approach, slowly and gently like creatures from the wild. And let them enter willingly into our hearts and come and go freely within the sanctuary of our contemplation, informing our souls as they arrive and being enlivened by the inspiration of our hearts as they leave. These shall be our truest thoughts. Our willing and effective ideas. Let us treasure their humble originality. Let us follow them gently back into the world with faith that they shall lead us to lives of harmony and integrity.
Amen.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Leunig, *When I Talk to You*.

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