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Mission Round Table

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"This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

Ministry to, with, and by People with Disabilities

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Editorial

Walter McConnell

> *"And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them." (Matt 4:23–24)*

The Gospel of Matthew introduces the person and work of Jesus by summarizing his preaching and healing roles and describing how people came to be healed. Later, Jesus passed these ministries on to his apostles whom he charged to "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Matt 10:8). His ministry was to be duplicated in their ministries. And as they taught their disciples to obey all that he commanded, each generation of Christians is to join this work of healing the sick, casting out demons, and preaching the gospel so that people can be freed from sin to serve as members of God's kingdom.

God's servants have always reached out to others in word and deed. Indeed, God has used many who were sick and became well—like the man freed from demons who Jesus commanded to "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you" (Luke 8:39)—and others who served despite their sickness—like Paul, with his thorn in the flesh. Gospel ministry has always been to, with, and by people with various disabilities.

A remarkable case in point is one of the first recruits to the China Inland Mission. George Stott was a Scotsman who came to faith at 21 while recuperating from an operation to remove his leg. After working for several years as a teacher, Stott heard about the needs of China and determined to go. When asked how he could do this on one leg, he replied: "I do not see those with two legs going, so I must."[1] Stott was the first Protestant missionary to work in Wenzhou, a city that now traces its large, vibrant church to this one-legged saint.

Our first article considers what makes a human a human. Though global laws address human rights, they fail to answer this more basic question. This failure is acute, as the nature of personhood is subject to various, and sometimes radical, understandings. Arguing that the philosophical assumptions underlying many of these views inevitably dehumanize people with disabilities, the paper demonstrates that only a biblical understanding of humanity will bring justice for all.

Most of our articles follow in George Stott's shadow by introducing us to missionaries who have been faithful in ministry despite their disabilities. Wang Yea-Hui, who has suffered from polio from her first year, considers various definitions of disability and contrasts traditional Chinese responses with Christian teaching. She desires that people will affirm that every child is valuable, recognize that all life has dignity, and honor everyone's potential. Her article is followed up by an interview which gives more insight into her personal life and ministry.

Ministry can be difficult whether one contracts polio as a child or as an adult. Jean Anderson was in the second category, as she was assaulted by the disease early in her second term of service. Through losing the ability to use her legs, God taught her lessons she couldn't have learned otherwise and gave her a ministry she couldn't have done otherwise. Her faithfulness to her faithful Lord is a lesson for us all.

It is one thing to recognize that people with special needs are made in the image of God and another thing to help them function in society and in God's kingdom. "Joyous" and "Hopeful" give us insight into how that can be done through running a business that both employs and supports people with special needs and provides an opportunity to invest the gospel in their lives.

Our final four articles are all family related. Erin tells the story of her family who have served in Asia for the majority of her life and reveals valuable insight into the way disabilities are commonly viewed and treated as she considers the disabilities of local people and her own sister. Marjorie Keeble introduces us to the life of her mother—Alison Pike Butler—who was born to CIM parents, served with the mission after completing education, and continued to serve despite being partially paralyzed after an attack by a swarm of hornets. Nathaniel Jennings tells his personal story of growing up in a mixed-race household. As he discovered, the shade of one's skin can produce a range of reactions and feelings whether one is in Bangladesh, England, or elsewhere. Christians, he argues, should stand behind those without privilege or power and seek the reconciliation and peace that comes through Jesus Christ. David and Adèle Ellis were married in Java in 1964 and served together for fifty-two years in Indonesia, Singapore, and the UK. In a moving chapter from his recent book, David shares their experience of how Adèle's encounter with Alzheimer's made the things of earth grow strangely dim as God prepared to welcome her into the light of his glory and grace.

May the Lord bless your reading and empower you for the ministry of preaching and healing.



Editor, *Misson Round Table*

[1] Grace Stott, *Twenty-Six Years of Missionary Work in China*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Tract Society, 1897), 3. Download available at https://missiology.org.uk/blog/26-years-missionary-work-china-grace-smith/.

On Human Rights and Identity Politics:

How Disability Challenges our Missiology

Lightyear

Lightyear is a social researcher based in East Asia, who has worked for over seventeen years with governments, academic institutions, and churches to challenge inequalities, exclusions, and discrimination.

The year 2020 is likely to be remembered primarily in relation to the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on global health and economics. However, even at this relatively early stage in the pandemic, the more "lateral" impact of a viral disease outbreak is perhaps likely to leave more lasting changes: the exacerbation of both international and intra-national inequalities; the brutal unmasking of the profound limitations of globalization, capitalism, and liberal democracy; and the amplification of identity politics which had already begun to challenge the prevailing social order. The intersection of these issues was at times explosive, perhaps most vividly in the Black Lives Matter movement, but also in the slower creep of authoritarianism in other places.

For Christians, perhaps particularly for those in countries with substantial Christian populations and legacy, these events have provoked a wide range of responses, and at times challenged or exposed long-held beliefs and practices. For many, this process has been painful, as at the core lie uncomfortable truths about power and the constant call of Christ to relinquish it. Perhaps what has been most exposed are the myriad ways in which human and personal identity are shaped, defined, and used to appropriate, assert, and protect power and privilege in ways which are often deeply hidden within cultural norms. We feel at our most vulnerable, and are often at our most defensive, when our identity seems to be under threat. Likewise, we often fail to see how much of our daily lives are informed by our own practice of identity construction, both of ourselves and of others.

If you read no further, perhaps I can lay out my position here: the tragedy of many of the current movements around identity politics stems not from the existence of different forms of "identity" (like male, female, Black, and White), but the misrecognition of what those identities are and are not. In short, and at the center of the deliberations I will make in this paper, there is a difference between an identity as a person who has a disability, and a disabled person. At the core of the first is personhood, and a personhood which includes, but is not defined by, having a disability. The second creates a category of person based on the presence of disability, and as such, a form of identity which is defined by difference. This results in the loss of personhood as a core, common identity. Fundamentally, then, we are dealing with the question of what it means to be human. This paper seeks to present insights from the disability perspective which can be useful in re-appraising notions of identity, and from that, a theology and missiology which reflect the values of Christ's kingdom. The first four sections of this paper explore the issue and nature of personhood as found in contemporary human rights and identity theory, before moving, in sections 5 and 6, to exploring the nature of personhood from a biblical perspective, and how that biblical perspective can help us navigate the complexities of identity politics, and also challenge and stimulate our missiology.

Abstract: Despite the proliferation of human rights law and instruments globally, little attention has been paid to the definition of "human" in human rights, particularly in a context in which changes in social norms and technology are already radically altering perceptions of the ontological nature of personhood. Whether considered performative identities, technologically enhanced trans-humans, or units of monetization in the global debt market, the nature of human personhood is undergoing multiple and radical transformations. Addressing the issue of human personhood is a critical task of twenty-first century mission, not in detached metaphysical terms, but rather in taking full account of the ways in which many biological, sociological, and economic iterations of personhood ultimately risk de-humanizing and degrading the *imago Dei*.

There is a difference between an identity as a person who has a disability, and a disabled person. At the core of the first is personhood, and a personhood which includes, but is not defined by, having a disability. The second creates a category of person based on the presence of disability, and as such, a form of identity which is defined by difference.

In Mark 2, Christ's affirmation of human personhood in God's image, as his first act towards the man with paraplegia, that precedes any subsequent spiritual, physical, and socio-economic re-orderings, points to the urgent missional task—radical affirmation of the human personhood of those whose biology, performance, or perceived economic value diverge from the majority of persons. The first "right" of humans is that of being recognized as a person. Articulation of this in our contemporary setting is crucial not only in wider society, but also in the church, where hierarchies of "difference" continue to result in exclusion or marginalization. Our "performative acts" of doing church, rather than resulting in the constitution of an identity—the Body—are instead apocalyptic: revealing the reality of the Body which is already there but awaiting a fuller revelation. In this reading, our performance of church in ways which enable inclusion of people with disabilities as full, essential members of the Body is neither reformist nor radical—it is an act of conformity to the nature of the Body already constituted with Christ as the head.

1. Missing persons: locating the human in human rights

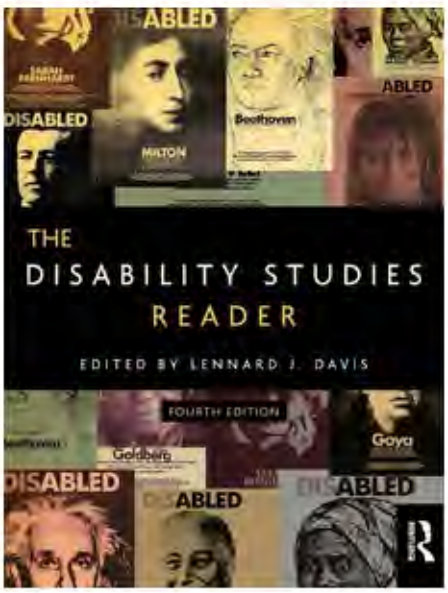
It is interesting to reflect that in the process of defining a range of "rights" for humans, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not provide any clear definition of the "human" to which these rights apply.[1]

> The human being the [human rights] convention is designed to protect remains undefined, which displays the concurrent contemporary quests for defining a human being through its rationality, its mere being or the quality of life that it enjoys.[2]

Classical definitions focus on two main areas: biological lineage—having features classifiable as *homo sapiens*—and capacities, such as speech and abstract thinking.[3]

Historically, humans are classified as those born to humans, locating human personhood in the realm of biological lineage. However, more recent debates on abortion legislation have raised the question of when such human-hood begins, and the point at which an in-utero foetus is classified as a human person.[4] The broad assumption of a unique category or taxonomy for humankind has been challenged recently, both by animal rights activists and proponents of transhumanism.[5] Here, the proposals are that non-human entities (such as animals, trees, and rivers) be granted "personhood" and a degree of legal agency which comes with such status.[6] Some, such as Christian Smith, argue for a common "underlying structure of human personhood" which cuts across cultures, defined more by behaviours, capacities, and faculties which are common to humans.[7] Here the question is "what must a being be like to be human?" and considers what kind of criteria could potentially be used to classify human personhood.[8] If the common "underlying structure" is constructed around particular behaviours, capacities, and faculties, does that render those whose behaviours are considered "inhuman" (such as Charles Manson) to be categorized as "non-human"?[9] Does this potentially disqualify as human some whose capacities may not meet the requirement of humanhood—a stance which has historically been used to justify the slaughter of indigenous peoples by colonialists? There have, in many eras, been categories of people considered less human, or even non-human, with often devastating and violent consequences.[10] Does it potentially qualify as human some biologically non-human entities (see the call for personhood for "Robo Sapiens")?[11]

Beyond legal definitions of human personhood, the nature of human identity as socially constructed is also



increasingly contested, with a deeper encoding of legislation and rights for self-determination of identities. The role of technology in altering human capacity, and indeed in challenging more traditional evolutionary biology in terms of framing the future of humanity (as engineered towards the "convergence" and "singularity") not only challenges the nature of human personhood, but also results in a dramatic reworking of attitudes to disease, disability, and ageing.[12] Here, technology is available not only to "fix" biological aberrations, but to enhance normal human capacity as a way to engineer a better future.

Whilst the category of human is not challenged per se by genderfluid identity constructions, the relationship between human as a biological category of being, and human identity as a social being is increasingly tenuous.[13] The "stuff" which makes "me" human in a biological sense, and the "form" or capacities which make(s) me human in a social sense, are increasingly less important, as other factors—aided both by technological advances and social norms—increasingly open to the personification of non-humans.[14]

Thus, the struggle to define humanity, and personhood, is intensified by three critical trends. Firstly, the rapid technological advances enabling a divergence not only in human enhancement, but also alternative expressions of personhood, such as avatars and Artificial Intelligence. Secondly, more systematic encoding (in legal frameworks) of more performative orderings of personhood, relating particularly to gender, and increasingly to other dimensions of personhood. Thirdly, the changes, through technology and increased mobility, of the economic constitution of human persons, away from ways of being framed around livelihoods to being objects of monetization, either as consumers or as debt-entitled beings—and in many cases both.

I will consider each of these trends and their implications, before moving towards two key conclusions: the missional task of affirming humanity as a "given" status, and the ecclesiological task of "apocalyptic performances" of inclusion which conform to the nature of the Body which is already constituted in eternity, with Christ as its head.

2. Humanity 2.0: the new transcendents

We stand on the brink of a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before.[15]

It is difficult, for me at least, to see any powerful principled reasons to remain human if we can create creatures, or evolve into creatures, fundamentally better than ourselves.[16]

The bold promise (or threat) articulated by Schwab in his description of the latest industrial revolution driven by artificial intelligence (IR 4.0) describes unheralded transformation; but what that transformation will look like remains unclear. Debates on the agendas and merits of "converging technologies"[17] frequently overlook the extent to which technology is already an integral part of most humans, through pharmacology, assistive technological devices such as smart phones, and implantable technology.[18] The notion of "enhanced humanity" is already one of degrees, rather than fact. Steve Fuller, in his provocatively titled work *Humanity 2.0*, attempts to chart trends within the "subject" of transhumanism, pointing to a resurgence of the "chemical worldview" of science, whose instrumentalist epistemology aims to "construct the most efficient means to our ends"[19] where

> "mind" and "life" lose the metaphysical mystique associated with their natural origins and come to be assessed simply in terms of the properties possessed by their realizations—be they human, carbon-based, silicon-based or some cyborgian mixture … starkly put, in this third metaphysical stage, a thing's identity is no longer constrained by its history, nor even its Darwinian evolutionary history.[20]

Theological debates on transhumanism illustrate varying positions, from more general acceptance (David Grummet on Teilhard de Chardin's "Christian Transhumanism" to a cautious, but perhaps futile, resistance to all but therapeutic measures, wary of a movement which is at once anthropocentric (placing humans at the



centre of human destiny) and, at the same time, rejecting the centrality of the human (carbon) nature of the "anthro" human personhood.[21]

One of the issues arising within the debate on engineered humanity is the tension between "curing dysfunction" and "enhancing function," where one is essentially "restoring species-type functioning," and the other "departing from species-type functioning in an upward trajectory."[22] Both, however, focus on the "fixing" of some capacity as a critical task. The question is: does that "fixing" make one more or less "human"? In debates on ableism, specific capacities are targeted for enhancement, which, proponents say, potentially then redefines the term disability away from more traditional "deficit" models, by re-categorizing humans based on different capacities, such that the "non-enhanced" may find themselves "disabled". However, as Fuller puts it, "whether this relativization of disability actually benefits or simply marginalizes even further those traditionally treated as … disabled remains an open question."[23]

I would argue for three reasons that the question is "open" rather than straightforward for all but a privileged few with access to the kind of enhancement technologies which transhumanists describe. Firstly, whilst purporting to focus on enhancing certain capabilities which can render an advantage in those perhaps otherwise disadvantaged, the ableist position fails to confirm how those capabilities are selected. As Jonathan Glover stated, "not just any aspect of present human nature is worth preserving."[24] Who decides which capabilities are preserved, which are enhanced, and which are discarded? This kind of engineered selection in turn produces more "precarious bodies," as Judith Butler and others would describe them, and by offering advantage to some, would disadvantage others. The most likely arbiter for which "capabilities" would "make it" is economic utility, which, as we shall see in section 4, is intrinsically linked to a de-humanization process.

Secondly, whilst the application of technology to reducing barriers for people with disabilities represents a major development, such processes also have a tendency to create or enhance other inequalities. For example, smart-phone applications, whilst offering significant possibilities for some people with disabilities, can create barriers for others.

Thirdly, and perhaps most critically, access to "enabling technology" and enhancement is staggeringly unequal globally, and the drive for "silicon" enhancement is itself linked to the creation of other disabilities and inequalities, as poorer and marginalized workers engage in risky work to extract and refine the raw materials of transhumanism, and some disable or disfigure themselves by donating organs to repay unmanageable debts.

Each view ultimately considers capacity deficits as, if not "disqualifying" a person from being human, then relativizing their status as a human, where disability is "the master trope of human disqualification."[25] Against this, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues for the essential value of disability and difference in the construction of human identity. As she says,

> disability gathers us into the everyday community of embodied humankind. It reflects the truth that we will all become disabled if we live long enough and that every life, every family has disability in it at some time. If disability is inherent in the human, how can it at the same time disqualify us from full membership in the human community?[26]

Fundamentally, then, the issue lies not in whether restoring or enhancing

The issue lies not in whether restoring or enhancing functions are permissible, desirable, or beneficial, but rather on the extent to which capabilities, or a lack of them, relativize human identity and status. If I remain disabled, or unenhanced, am I somehow less human because of it? And if I am somehow less human, am I also less entitled to the rights which come by virtue of being human?

functions are permissible, desirable, or beneficial, but rather on the extent to which capabilities, or a lack of them, relativize human identity and status. If I remain disabled, or unenhanced, am I somehow less human because of it? And if I am somehow less human, am I also less entitled to the rights which come by virtue of being human? Philosophically, we may tend to provide a more reassuring answer, but in terms of practical lived experience, it is hard to argue that the realization of human rights is not heavily contingent on being more "able".

3. Performing humanity: Butler, gender, and the politics of difference

> We are becoming fluid and many sided … evolving a sense of self appropriate to the restless flux of our time … This mode of being … enables us to engage in continuous exploration and personal experiment … [This] self emerges from confusion, from the widespread feeling that we are losing our psychological moorings.[27]

The opening of Robert J. Lifton's *The Promethean Self* in some ways presaged the more structured analysis of identity as "performatively constructed" articulated by, amongst others, Judith Butler. Drawing on Searle's speech-act theory, *Gender Trouble* and subsequent works describe gender identity not as essentially derived from the nature of the "body" as given, but as something constituted through performances of gender, rather than the performance deriving from a prior identity. In this case, gender is inscribed onto a body, rather than being dictated to by a body.[28] Performativity is, firstly, anticipatory, where "the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside self[29] and secondly, "a repetition and a ritual which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body."[30] Thus, gender identity is not stable, but is rather "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted … through the stylized repetition of acts."[31] The performance does not take place in an echo chamber—there is an audience who validates, who responds, if the performance is credible, compelling, and reasonably recognizable:

> Gender performativity and its materialization in the form of "bodies that matter" is driven largely by the desire for recognition of the gendered self as a viable, intelligible subject. In other words, underpinning our performance of gender is the desire to project a coherent and compelling identity, one that is recognized and valorised by others.[32]

Whilst the performative aspect of identity does not in itself challenge the status of being human, it has increasingly impacted the type and value of the human person concerned. The de-coupling of gender identity from biological categories is now enshrined in national laws, which in turn also provide State assistance for alteration of the biological form to further enhance the effectiveness of the performance of identity. This paper does not intend to pursue particular arguments around gender identity; rather it aims to use these as an illustration of how the social construction of human personhood is in many cases derived from the capacity to deliver a compelling performance of "human" to be valorized by society as fittingly "human".

Linking Butler's work to disability studies, Robert McRuer paraphrases its ideas on gender identity, substituting "able-bodiedness" into the text:

> [Able-bodiedness] offers normative … positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals [able-bodiedness] itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy. Indeed, I would offer this insight into [able-bodied identity] as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself, as an alternative [disabled] perspective.[33]

If being human, and being fully human, is linked to certain performances, and these performances are generally ordered around neuro-normative, bio-normative forms, what space does that leave for those without the capacity, or the necessary environmental enabling, to deliver a suitably compelling performance of "human" to avoid being disqualified? At first, this seems overly dramatic, as there are numerous examples of prominent politicians, scholars, and athletes who have been able to render a performance sufficiently deemed worthy and compelling to allow their participation in the higher echelons of society. And yet, we are speaking less of the qualification as human per se, but as *what kind of human*. Here, there is a subtle performative expectation of the kind of performance expected of a person with disabilities, for example, in negotiating identities in the workplace.[34] Hence, to be accepted as a "qualifying" person with disabilities, a certain performance is required, a performance which conforms to certain societal expectations and norms.[35] Even then, the nature of the identity is still, by and large, defined as a "different" form: human, yes; a person, yes; but a person with disabilities.

Critics of the application of Butler's theories on performativity into disability studies have highlighted the problems of the tenuous link between the body and identity in Butler's work, where, in the end, for people with disabilities, the option to enact a different performance may well be constrained by bodily capacity. If qualifying as a human (for persons with disabilities) first requires qualifying as a person with disabilities through an acceptable performance, how does that in turn introduce, firstly, relentless pressure to conform to neuro/bio normalcy (through surgery, medication, or other technology), and secondly, intractable inequalities

for those with disabilities resulting in more "anti-social" behaviours or those who lack the ability to conform to the performative expectations of "people with disabilities"? This links to the third strand, that of economic inequality.

4. Precarious bodies: human as an object of consumption and/or debt

Each industrial revolution has redefined human value, and in doing so introduced different patterns of inequalities.[36] The fourth industrial revolution, termed IR 4.0, is so termed to describe the changes emerging from technological advances building on the "digital revolution". This phase is characterized by "ubiquitous and mobile internet, smaller … more powerful and cheaper sensors, and artificial intelligence and machine learning."[37] Whilst more visible, accessible dimensions of these technological advances (such as more mobile internet and AI-assisted processes aiding consumption) generate little in the way of headlines, as articles on the role and impact of artificial intelligence on employment and social relations have proliferated in the mainstream media. These frequently focus on varied scenarios for employment.[38] Many futuristic projections dwell on the dynamics of replacement-displacement-redundancy scenarios or the "out of control" scenarios.[39]

Predictions of the impact on employment vary—with some reports highlighting the loss of low-skilled jobs to automation[40]—whilst others predicting a larger effect on more "white collar" work.[41] Some analysts point to the potential of technology to both create more jobs, and changes not only to the nature of work, but also the role of work and wages in society.[42] Discussions on the effects of IR 4.0 cannot be taken in isolation from the technology enabling the processes of automation. In Europe (and increasingly other industrialized countries), the increased portability of the internet is a key enabler of elements of the "gig economy" and newer, more flexible but less financially secure modes of livelihood. At the same time, these processes enable greater networking between individuals through social media, potentially re-shaping union-style relations. For example, social media platforms increasingly provide the platform for individuals and groups to draw attention to unfair practice, which can directly impact consumer practice and, ultimately, share prices. Social media allows less regulated, more fluid networks—and perhaps are the last remaining option for the "zero-hours" contract workers of the precariat.[43]

In the midst of this innovation, inequality—as more and more are left behind—and the place and role of human labour are redefined. In describing the "precariat," Guy Standing seeks to highlight the plight of those whose work is increasingly commoditized, beyond simple "day-waged" formulae to the "gig economy" where each unit of labour is not only priced, but subject to competitive tendering ("Uberization"). It is not difficult to see the trajectory of this model with respect to people with disabilities: where "work" has little if any connection to livelihood, and where efficiency is the only metric of success.

However, the shift has been broader. Whilst not yet anticipating "post-work" societies, the economic trend increasingly views humans/persons/citizens not as a source of labour, but as sources of consumption of the products of labour. That consumption also extends to debt, such that Neilson and Rossiter provocatively speak of the identity of a human as a "unit of potential indebtedness," and being human qualifies one to be the target of lending agencies seeking consumers for their product (debt).[44] In this scenario of humans-as-consumers (rather than producers), what place is there for the less efficient to be producers? Furthermore, at some point, where do the sums fail to add up—and so what of those who, at the reckoning, have less capacity to "produce"? I am thinking particularly of people with disabilities in poorer contexts, and even of the situations, mentioned earlier, where body parts are sold to repay debt, a form of disabling to repay debts.

A self-referential defining of human personhood, whether in relation to performance or productivity, inevitably leads away from, rather than towards, a "human right" of equality and dignity, as the "norms" of performance or the control of productivity are not freely determined, but subject to the influences and permissions of a powerful and often faceless few.

5. Broken tiles, whole identities: Mark 2

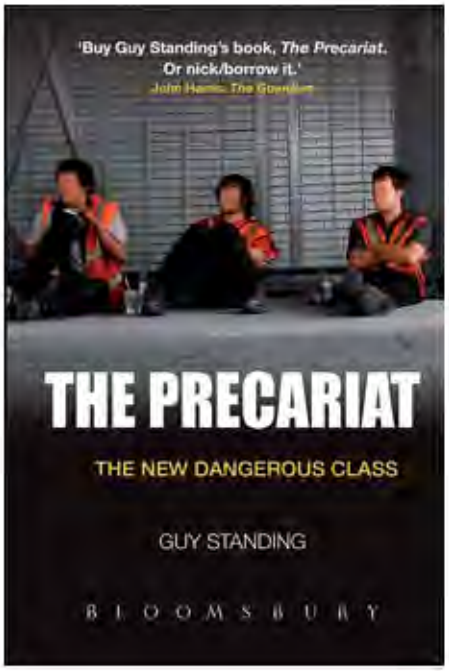
The previous sections have sketched out some parameters of how human personhood is defined by different intellectual perspectives, in both quantitative terms (who qualifies) and qualitative terms (the forms which qualify, and perhaps are more qualified). Whilst these different perspectives do contribute valuable insights into human being-ness and personhood, at the same time they illustrate the ultimately hollow nature of human personhood which is essentially defined solely in relation to itself. Moreover, such a self-referential defining of human personhood, whether in relation to performance or productivity, inevitably leads away from, rather than towards, a "human right" of equality and dignity, as the "norms" of performance or the control of productivity are not freely determined, but subject to the influences and permissions of a powerful and often faceless few. The orphan may briefly experience "the freedom to name, define, or generate oneself,"[45] but soon finds that the self is determined by a myriad of hidden forces. The self-referential "self" is, in the end, an empty one. What, then, are biblical perspectives on human personhood, and how do these define human being-ness in ways which are not simply self-referring?

The scene in Mark 2 is suitably theatrical. A crowded room, with the pathways into the centre—potential avenues for the weak, the sick, and the disabled to come for healing—blocked by religious teachers, critics, and the general public. None seemed particularly keen to give way to four (men?) and their stretcher-bound friend, despite the known propensity of the Galilean teacher to do spectacular healings. So be it. We'll go through the roof, perhaps a little risky as brick

and masonry fall rather too close for comfort to the healer-man/Son of God. Precariously dangled down on ropes, his body in full view of all, with all its broken, weak, and wasted parts. He passively invaded the sacred space reserved for the holy and the deserving. He had no right to be there. Levitical law prohibited those with disabilities from serving as priests; this man's place was already reserved for him—begging for alms and, in doing so, providing an avenue for donors to gain "good merit." What business does he have bursting so violently into the sacred space of religious teaching?

Jesus, "seeing their faith," then uttered a world-shattering word to this man: "Son". Before any words of forgiveness, of healing, of restoration, comes a simple affirmation of his identity. In some translations, the words are expanded: "*My* son." Here is the first and crucial response to the challenges of transhumanism, of social performativity. In his disabled state, in his non-performative state, Jesus affirmed this man's status as a son of God, as one made in the image of God, as possessing that image, and as such, fully worthy of being called not only "human" but "human" in relation to God.[46] For us, this confirms three crucial points.

Firstly, that human personhood is fully conferred in the absence of any "correction" or "enhancement" as the inherent property of all being made in God's image. It is inherited, as gift, and is unchanged by any bodily externality.



Secondly, that human personhood is conferred in relation to God, not to bodily form or capacity to perform. The "type" of human we are is conferred by the Creator, not by any particular performance based on societal norms. Whilst a gender pronoun is used here (and here I would add my own opinion, that our "gender" identity is known to God), the emphasis is not on the male/female dimension of gender, but rather the relational aspect of gender—sonship. In a similar passage later in the chapter, Jesus calls the woman healed of internal bleeding "daughter", again affirming the full human personhood of one whose disability would ordinarily exclude her from religious society. This affirms the most important dimension of human identity—the relationship with our Creator. Even unknown or unrequited, that assignation remains true—all are his sons and daughters.

Thirdly, linked to the above, is the reality that in the case of persons with disabilities, and in the case of this man, he is, before Christ, not a person with disabilities, but a person. His identity is not bound to his form, so that, in Christ, he is a person, a son, first and foremost.

The drama moves on, and the next utterance, against all expectations—here I picture the disappointment on the man's face, and of his friends'—Jesus says, "your sins are forgiven." Not for a moment do I suspect here that any link is being made between disability and sin; rather, that, following from the point above, Jesus sees before him not a person with disabilities, but a person, and as a person, this man's great need is for forgiveness and restoration. There is perhaps a subtext too here. It is possible that institutional, physical, and economic barriers prevented this man from being able to make any ritual sacrifices, thus rendering him unable to make the required "performance" for absolution. Was Jesus just playing the "Advance to Go" card? Either way, the sequence of words and actions affirms three things: (1) a repudiation of any link between sin and disability (evidenced by Jesus' declaration that his healing was merely to show his authority to forgive); (2) the clear-minded logic of recognizing that this man's needs, as a human, were fundamentally human—like any other human, and not "special needs"—and (3) that the intention of Jesus was for



Healing the Paralytic at Capernaum, engraving by Bernhard Rode (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons. It is in the public domain in its country of origin, the US, and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or less.

this man to live a right life as a disciple, and that he anticipated that this would be fully possible in the absence of physical healing. Right here, right now, the man is affirmed, forgiven, and welcomed as a disciple.

The drama continues with the healing of the man and the fascinating addition of the instruction to "take up your mat and walk." The four friends—where are they now?—are no longer needed. This man must re-enter society and care for himself. He is no longer to be a dependent consumer, indebted to others, but a producer, taking responsibility for himself. This is not then a passage justifying "fitness to work" certifications; rather it is, I believe, a call to challenge the assignation of dependent status on people with disabilities within a religious ecology, mitigating against an inclusive and empowering attitude. This is not setting a normative performative requirement for persons with disabilities to be increasingly self-sufficient, but instead asking—of us all—what we are contributing in our different ways to the society we are part of. This requires a radical de-coupling of contribution from notions of pure economic efficiency, but also liberates the human identity from

one simply defined by consumption and increasingly, indebtedness.

This draws attention to an urgent missional task in a world where identity politics are deeply intertwined with inequalities—whether of those with disabilities, or those of excluded ethnic or sexual minorities. Our gospel message starts not with the power of Christ to heal, or the urgency of forgiveness, but with the affirmation that humanity and personhood is a bestowed status. As we engage with people—with communities excluded, marginalized, downtrodden, and forgotten, as well as those bewildered by choice and confused by the fluidity of social expectations—we bring the same message: before everything else, you are a son/daughter of God. Identity is then not a matter of karma, of cursing, of moral failing, of bad luck, of societal prejudice, of bad genes, of poverty, of sexuality, of religion. It comes first from an affirmation, or revelation, of that first truth—made in the image of this God. In twenty-first century Europe and Asia—whether in cities or villages, in refugee camps, or call centres—our urgent missional task is radical re-humanization, against the dehumanization of much modern and postmodern social and economic arrangements. The answer to the question "who am I?" (or even "what am I?") is framed not in biological terms, nor performative capacity, nor economic value, but based on one factor entirely external to humans: our "made-ness" in a particular image, and the intention of our Maker to restore the relationship with him.

Our gospel message starts not with the power of Christ to heal, or the urgency of forgiveness, but with the affirmation that humanity and personhood is a bestowed status. As we engage with people—with communities excluded, marginalized, downtrodden, and forgotten, as well as those bewildered by choice and confused by the fluidity of social expectations—we bring the same message: before everything else, you are a son/daughter of God.

The "human" of human rights is, then, defined in this way, from which flows a more nuanced debate on the rights which are inherent to that human. But we can say, first and foremost, that the fundamental right of all humans is to be addressed as humans, as persons.

6. Genesis: The created human and the dimensions of personhood

Perhaps this section should precede the account in Mark, but here I would like to sketch three points from the Genesis creation narrative which give some dimensions to human personhood and then to extrapolate from that a means by which Galatians 3:28 is a reality for all humanity, and not just those who are recognizably "in Christ." Firstly, as alluded to above, humans are created beings, and in particular, created in the image of God. Immediately, we affirm that this does not refer to physical form, but to nature. In particular, that humans are the only created beings whose nature relates to both heaven and earth. Angels are heavenly bodies, animals earthly, but humans are created to straddle both worlds. Personhood is thus conferred as a specific category of created being, not as a higher form on a continuum.

Secondly, by creating humans in his image, male and female, God made a clear distinction between humans as a category of being, and different expressions of that category. Humans were created in the image of one God—meaning there was one image—but the expressions of the human persons made in that image took on diverse forms. They remained, however, one category of being.

Thirdly, humans were created to be innately interdependent—with God and with each other. Thus, even if the form of being appears to embody a degree or type of dependency which renders that person less "independent," that can in no way be considered

"Hi, my name is Ben. I am 33 years old. I like arts and crafts and going for walks with my mom. I enjoy food and car rides. My parents bring me for short holidays as they know I like plane rides too."



From young, Ben Koh has been fascinated by colours, music, and the freedom the great outdoors offers. He is musically talented and swims and enjoys his daily walks (time to de-stress). Weekdays are spent at St. Andrew's Autism Centre (Day Activity Centre) while Saturdays are for enjoying art and craft classes.

On Sundays, Ben goes for morning church service with his family. A wall mural project at church a few years ago re-kindled Ben's passion in art. Since then, he has been creating and adapting artwork from the images he sees and likes. Ben may not be very vocal but his love for life speaks volumes.

a basis to determine a different category of being, such as "disabled". If interdependency is a crucial, innate part of what it means to be human, the drive for independence would appear in some ways to be "anti-human."

What we reach, here, is a foundation which resists the creation of categories of being as separate or hierarchical ontologies. We can accept that there are different expressions of "human" which vary in physical form, emotional outlook, etc. But such different expressions do not permit us to create separate categories which confer variegated status. Hence, returning to Mark 2, for Jesus, the man with the disability in front of him was a human person, and his expression of personhood did not result in any change in that category or permit assigning him to a sub-category of human personhood. What Galatians 3:28 affirms is this: that those now in Christ are, from a sociological perspective, drawn from a range of different categories of humanity, determined by gender, free status, and ethnicity. And yet, in Christ, such categories no longer define who they are—they are in Christ. Furthermore, as God's people are indeed the "proto-people" for the new humanity, our outlook on others is similarly defined by these truths from Genesis, Mark, and Galatians: that those around us, whilst expressing a wide array of physical, cultural, and emotional diversity in their expressions of human personhood, all nonetheless are human persons, and we resist using their diversity as a framework for making categories of people. That resisting of categorization is crucial; otherwise, our tendency is to relate to the category, rather than the person. So often the question arises: "How should I reach Buddhists/Muslims/Hindus?" A danger here is that we are relating to others based on a specific category, rather than as people, as humans.

By resisting the use of difference as a means to categorize and "Other" people, we are also free to embrace the diverse expressions of humanity which we meet. Diversity represents a point of engagement, but not a means to frame our interaction. Gender, religion, ethnicity, disability—all of these are part of "who we are" and yet at the same time do not define our being, or the "beingness" of others. This cuts across two major contemporary identity theories: firstly, intersectionality, and secondly, performativity.

Intersectionality rightly points to how facets of identity contribute to persistent inequalities, such that often gender, race, and religion combine to effect privilege or exclusion. However, application of intersectionality to create categories of being is rejected here for the reasons explained above—that the dimensions of variety are significant in shaping who we are, but are ultimately not determinants of our being.

Likewise, performativity locates identity within the realm of what is enacted and presented—thus, gender is not a trait you are born with, but something which you "act" in concert with societal expectations. Again, we return to our points from Genesis, that our identity, whilst shaped by factors with which we are born and those which we enact and present, is not the same as our essential beingness, and that again, creating categories of being based on "performance" is also flawed and runs counter to the truth we know of our essential beingness being located in the image of God.

> the action of a new alliance, and those bodies are seized and animated by those existing spaces in the very acts by which they reclaim and resignify their meanings.[49]

This performativity is rooted in collective identity, inscribing a wider shared identity within a claimed space. This perhaps illustrates the ambiguous nature of performative assembly: what are the scripts, and who writes them? Or to expand the notion: which "collective" determines the "collective identity"—raising questions of power and privilege again.[50] As Butler argues:

> Their struggle is its own social form … an alliance begins to enact the social order it seeks to bring about by establishing its own modes of sociability. And yet, the alliance is not reducible to a collection of individuals … action in alliance happens precisely between those who participate, and this is not an ideal or empty space.[51]

Diversity represents a point of engagement, but not a means to frame our interaction. Gender, religion, ethnicity, disability—all of these are part of "who we are" and yet at the same time do not define our being, or the "beingness" of others.

7. A body which matters: When Butler went to church

In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler considers plural performative action in public, and assembled responses to precarious conditions, such as the Tahir Square uprising.[47] Whilst performativity was initially used to describe the capacity of speech to act, or consummate an action, in this reading, the performative "enacts or produces that which it names."[48] Through a collective performance, a "space" is created and maintained, a space inhabited by bodies, whose plurality and proximity results in the expression of a "something"—a movement. Through this collective appearing,

> a new space is created, a new "between" of bodies, as it were, that lays claim to existing space through

Both Butler and transhumanism speak of a restless remaking of identity, in search of an image which is an evolution or iteration of what we are. That restless remaking is well known in Christian theology, yet the restless remaking we know is not towards an as-yet-unknown transcendence, or a compelling performance, but a process of conforming, conforming to an image known to us, however dimly. In Butler's gender, and de Chardin's transhumanism, a body is either reconstituted or re-engineered to some more advanced or compelling form. Drawing further on Butler, what kind of "body" is in some way "performatively constituted" by Christian believers gathered as "church"? And how is that performance, that "alliance of bodies", shaped by the individual bodies which inhabit the space, which are part of the performance? To phrase the argument more simply: how does a "performance"

That we are his body, the church, indicates that it is not in performing inclusion that we bring an inclusive body into being, but that by doing so we reflect the kind of body which is already there.

of church look when the "bodies" who are included in that performance are varied, are plural, are expressive of a wide range of ethnic, economic, and disability status? And what "form" is constituted by different ways in which the performance is performed?

I would argue, however, that in Christ, that body—the church—has already been constituted, and our participation does not reconstitute it, but is a conforming to its likeness. This perhaps then describes our performances as apocalyptic: revealing a truth otherwise hidden, but revealed through humble, holy theatrics of inclusion as worship. If that is the case, our inclusive practice is not aimed at somehow reconstituting the body, but rather in conforming to what it already is. It needs neither an identity change, nor a technological enhancement, but a thorough appraisal of what, cosmically, is already there. His resurrection body bore visible wounds, as if there were glory in the evidence of disruption to the bodily form. That we are his body, the church, indicates that it is not in performing inclusion that we bring an inclusive body into being, but that by doing so we reflect the kind of body which is already there. **MRT**

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Viewing Disabilities from the Perspectives of Chinese Culture and Christian Belief[1]

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(王雅惠)



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If my life was a musical instrument, God has shown himself to be such an outstanding musician that no matter how broken the instrument might be, he is able to play it in a way that moves the heart strings of those who hear.

When any young couple awaits the arrival of their first child, their hearts are filled with boundless hopes and aspirations. However, when they discover that their child has no arms and her left leg is only half as long as her right one, their expectations are dashed. Nevertheless, one couple who faced this reality raised their child with such incomparable love and wisdom that Lena Maria Kingvall—who recorded her story in *Footnotes: A Life without Limbs*—learned to swim at three years of age and represented Sweden in international disabled competitions where she won multiple medals.[2] She later graduated with honors with a degree in modern music from The Royal College of Music in Stockholm and has since travelled to many countries to perform. Despite her disability, Lena Maria has not given any signs that she feels inferior, bitter, or wants to complain about her situation. To the contrary, she exudes self-esteem and confidence as she overcomes all kinds of obstacles and difficulties. As she says, "As one who has a disability, I have constantly experienced the reality that 'difficulties bring strength.' … What I lack has allowed me to experience God's grace on countless occasions."[3]

The true story of Lena Maria really changed the way I think about people with disabilities. The impression we get when we hear the word "disability" may be of street beggars in ragged clothes who cannot get around very well, or of a masseuse wearing dark glasses, or of someone with a low income, low education, and low IQ. But is it right only to consider people with disabilities as a group that cannot live independently and must rely on the charity and compassion of others in order to survive? Are they really, due to their physical or psychological disabilities, unable to live as dignified and independent a life as the average person? In order to delve deeper into this issue, I would like to begin by defining disability in order to show its place in traditional Chinese culture and Christian culture.

1. The definition of disability

According to the World Health Organization, "disability" can be understood on three different levels.[4] The first level refers to medically recognized physical and psychological injuries or conditions which are often referred to as impairments. The second level refers to activity limitation in which physical and/or psychological conditions prevent full engagement in what are considered normal daily activities. This may be termed a disability. The third level refers to participation restrictions in normal daily activities, emphasizing the way a person's disability impacts their interaction with their physical or social environment. The above three levels are primarily classified according to the function of the external body or internal organs, but in fact disabilities seem to cover both mental and physical functions. In "Design Appeal for a Barrier-Free Building Environment," Li Zhenglong wrote that "the so-called disabilities . . . in terms of nature, can be divided into two kinds, one refers to the mental barriers . . . The other refers to physical barriers."[5] For this reason, if we overlook bodily defects as defined by medicine, being "disabled" includes both mental and physical disabilities.

From this, it can be seen that "disability" can either be defined narrowly in the medical sense or more broadly. The disability-related laws in Taiwan use broad definitions. According to the Special Education Law, which

was updated in 1997, persons with disabilities are divided along physical and psychological lines. The third article of the law states: "What this law terms 'physical and mental disorders' refers to those with physical or psychological impairments who require special education and assistance with special educational services." It further divides people with disabilities into twelve distinct categories.[6] In addition, the third section of the "Law on the Protection of Persons with Physical and Mental Disorders" contains a similar definition: "What this law terms persons with physical and mental disabilities refers to individuals whose participation in society and engagement in productive activities are restricted or made impossible." It then divides people with disabilities into fourteen categories.[7] To sum it up, scholars, experts, and disability-related laws consider people with disabilities not only from a medical point of view, but also from a wider physiological and psychological perspective. This paper similarly views "disability" in the sense of this broader definition.

2. Traditional Chinese cultural attitudes towards disabilities

In America, people with physical and mental disabilities began to awaken as early as the 1960s as a result of the civil rights movement. They are now considered individuals who have equal status and rights with those who are not physically or otherwise impaired. Many disability-related laws have been enacted and implemented in the United States, such as the Building Barriers Act (1968), the Rehabilitation Act (1973), the Education for All Disabled Children Act (1975), the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, and other similar laws. The emphasis of these bills has shifted from the negative "protection" and "support" for people with physical and mental disabilities to an emphasis on actively safeguarding opportunities and rights for persons with disabilities in employment, education, etc. By contrast, Taiwan did not enact the Disability Benefits Act (殘障福利法) and the Special Education Act (特殊教育法) until 1980 and 1984 respectively. Such laws as the amended Disability Benefits Act of 1990 and the 1997 Disability Protection Act (身心障礙者保護法) were passed about two decades later than similar statutes in the United States. As a result of institutional factors—such as the lack of manpower for disability welfare work, the fragmentation of government departments, the lack of clarity in the division of powers and responsibilities, and inadequate attention by local government authorities—some laws have not been fully implemented.

The failure of Chinese society to value the rights and needs of people with disabilities and consequent failure to try to understand them is closely related to certain aspects of traditional Chinese culture. Traditionally, Chinese believed that the actions of ancestors affected the fate of future generations. If a child was born with a disability, people would often blame it on an ancestor's lack of virtue, declare that the *feng shui* of ancestral graves was not right, or surmise that an ancestor caused it to serve as a warning. This way of thinking often loaded the parents with such a great sense of guilt that they felt they had totally lost face and shamed the family to the extent that they were unable to seek help from the outside world. Instead, they hid the child at home, not willing to let others know that an abnormal child lived in the house. This superstition affects the child's self-image so that he lives under a shadow of inferiority and self-pity. Even more serious is the impact it has on the child's relationships, as well as marriage and education possibilities. After gaining a basic education, some boys with disabilities are sent to work in factories or take up an apprenticeship, while girls learn skills like tailoring or embroidery. Only a few fortunate ones are able to complete higher education. But even these may face a wide range of difficulties and discrimination as they seek employment since there is no guarantee that they can find a job and they may not even be able to obtain a fair chance of getting one. As a result, people with disabilities often need to exert twice the effort of others in order to earn a living.

Scholars, experts, and disability-related laws consider people with disabilities not only from a medical point of view, but also from a wider physiological and psychological perspective.



In her book *One of the Lucky Ones*, Lucy Ching (程文輝) relates the following story:

> Our neighbor … told my mother, "It's unlucky for you to have a blind daughter. I think it's probably because you or your husband, or your parents or ancestors, did something wrong that offended the gods. Otherwise you would not have a daughter like this." My mother blamed my misfortune on my own bad luck… I know my parents love me and worry about my future, … However, they didn't know that just giving me food and shelter is not enough. They didn't realize that blind children, like ordinary children, should be educated.[8]

Ching's response to the social environment of the time demonstrates that their wrong understanding of people with disabilities resulted in an enormous amount of pressure being placed upon them and their families. People with disabilities simply exhibit some kind of problem with their physical or psychological functions that can usually be improved by education and medical care. It is unfortunate that traditional culture has produced negative and superstitious ideas regarding disabled people that have cut them off from education and the general public. The greatest injustice disabled people face is that before they have a chance to prove their abilities, they are misunderstood

and shut out. It's not that society intends to harm them, it's just that ignorance causes people to fear the disabled.

Another issue that impacts people with disabilities is the Chinese education system. Chinese education has long aimed to benefit normal, intelligent children. Any child who is unable to keep up with the system due to some special needs will quickly be abandoned. Since traditional Chinese ideals elevate academic performance, the general public—including parents—have developed negative ideas about the disabled and equate disability with low ability. Similarly, those who formulate and execute educational policies have given little thought to changing the system to address the needs of the disabled.

3. Christian culture

A basic tenet of Christianity states that "everyone is created in the image of God." From this perspective, everyone—regardless of race, color, origin, disability, or whatever—is equal and of value before God. These ideas can be found in both the Old and the New Testaments. For example, in the Old Testament, Isaiah 43:3–4 says: "For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior…. you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you…" Yahweh—who created the heavens and the earth and is the true God of the universe—sees everyone as precious and honored and he loves them. For this reason, no one should be ignored or despised. In Psalm 139:14–16, we see that every person is fearfully and wonderfully made, the result of God's amazing creation. Before our bodies were formed, God had seen us, known us, and written of us in his book. Since everyone is wonderfully created by God, even our weaknesses or defects can be said to be good—wonderful!—and worthy of our respect. Who has the right to say that what God identifies as good creation demonstrates deficient workmanship?

Jesus' teachings frequently emphasized that everyone is of great importance to God. John 3:16, which is familiar to everyone, says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." God loves everyone in the world without conditions. Just because a person is disabled doesn't mean that God doesn't love him or will not save him. Neither will God love someone more just because he is intelligent or beautiful. The term "whoever" here includes all people, including the disabled. Similarly, when Jesus was on the earth, he traveled through many towns and villages to find people who were lost (Matt 18:11; Luke 19:10). As Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick…. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt 9:12–13). He also said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt 10:29–30). It is those who have flaws and are weak who most need the grace and salvation that Jesus gives. Similarly, the Apostle Paul said: "On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor" (1 Cor 12:22–24). The reality is that the more a person is disabled, the more they can demonstrate God's love (Luke 7:41–43).

The most distinctively Christian perspective on disability is found in the healing of the blind man in John 9:1–3. When the disciples saw this man who was born blind, they asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?" The question the disciples asked makes it clear that they held a preconceived notion that a person's disability must be the result of sin. What they weren't sure of was whether the man in question or his parents had sinned. Their question makes it fairly certain that the Jewish view of the disabled was similar to traditional Chinese thought that sees disability as a result of sin. Jesus' answer turns this traditional concept on its head—a person's disability may not be because of sin, but for the glory of God. There is therefore no need to feel that someone with a disability is inferior or that they should be blamed for their condition. To the contrary, we should respect the person who in this way brings glory to God.

Based on their Christian understanding that everything is created by God and deserves respect, many missionaries from Europe and the United States have given themselves and sacrificed lives of comfort to go to Africa, Central and South America, and even to remote islands in the Far East, such as Taiwan,



Healing of the Blind Man by Carl Bloch (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons.[9]

to preach the gospel. Many of them have also introduced advanced medical technology and equipment. Not a few of these missionaries have made considerable contributions to helping care for the disabled and giving them an opportunity for education. Dr. Olav Bjorgaas (畢嘉士醫師) from Norway is a case in point. In 1954, Bjorgaas and his wife went to Taiwan not long after they got married. He first settled in Taipei, serving at the Lesheng Sanitorium (樂生療養院), which specialized in treating leprosy patients. In 1956, his church sent him to the Christian Clinic in Pingdong, the predecessor of the Pingdong Christian Hospital (屏東基督教醫院). He also set up a specialty dermatology clinic in Kaohsiung to treat leprosy patients and established a sanatorium for patients with tuberculosis.

During the 1950s when Taiwan was hit by a polio epidemic, sanitoriums began to take in children with polio. Taiwan's first home for children with polio was established in 1961. Due to his Christian faith, Dr. Bjorgaas valued the life of every young person and was fully committed to ensure that the worth of each child be affirmed, their dignity respected, and their full potential developed. To help the children with polio, he invited physiotherapists from the United States to provide physical therapy, and ordered the custom supports and iron shoes the children needed from the United States. Though no one at the time thought it was worth it, Bjorgaas expended great amounts of money, labor, and thought because he believed that helping a child who could only crawl to stand up on his own was a victory. And although no primary school at the time was willing to accept children with reduced mobility, Bjorgaas made countless trips until the door was finally opened for these children to attend school. Bjorgaas spent most of his life helping people with disabilities live independent and dignified lives, mainly because the source of his strength was God's unconditional love for all. Besides Bjorgaas, many other missionaries have given themselves to serve people with disabilities in Taiwan, though, due to space constraints, I cannot recount their ministries one by one.



Dr. Olav Bjorgaas pictured on the cover of the Chinese translation of his biography (originally written in Norwegian) by Bjørn Jarle Sørheim-Queseth.

4. Conclusion

In recent years, with the rise of humanitarianism, the awakening of the self-awareness of disabled people and the call for their equality have become trends. Civil authorities in multiple countries who have followed this trend, have enacted laws to protect the rights and interests of people with disabilities. This is a welcome situation. Even so, there is no denying that the protection of the disabled in many places exists mainly at the level of laws and regulations, and that it has not really impacted the mindset of society and people. To deal with this issue adequately, we need to begin with the deep-rooted problems of Chinese culture. We need to completely eliminate the way traditional culture negates the value of the individual, focuses on the elite to the exclusion of the weak, avoids reality, fears anxiety, and approves utilitarian selfishness and other similar concepts. We need to replace these with the spirit of sacrificial devotion that comes through Jesus' enabling, including the twin attributes of acceptance and selfless love. If this is done, work with people who are disabled can be raised from its current surface level to an elevated plain so that social consciousness and the thought life are impacted. As one with a disability, I want to give the authorities in many Chinese settings fairly high marks for their many efforts on behalf of people with disabilities and affirm their continued work in this direction. Even so, I have higher hopes that the general public develops a correct understanding of people with disabilities, accepts us as an integral part of society, and extends basic respect and dignity toward us. I also desire to see the spirit that moved Dr. Bjorgaas take root in the hearts and minds of all Chinese people so that we affirm the value of every child, respect the dignity of all life, and honor the potential of every living soul. **MRT**

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[1] This article is abridged and translated from one published in a Chinese Christian magazine.
[2] Lena Maria Klingvall, *Footnotes: A Life without Limbs* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2001). Chinese version (used in this article) is 蓮娜瑪莉亞·克林佛, *用腳飛翔的女孩* (傳神愛網, 2001).
[3] Text translated from the Chinese version *用腳飛翔的女孩*, 114.
[4] https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/65990/WHO_HSC_ACE_99.2.pdf (accessed 23 October 2020)
[5] Li Zhenglong, "Design Appeal for a Barrier-Free Building Environment," see 李政隆, "為無障礙建築環境設計呼籲," *特殊教育季刊* 25 (1987): 1–3.
[6] Article 3 of the Special Education Act (特殊教育法), as amended by the Legislative Council in Taiwan in 1997, divides persons with mental and physical disabilities into twelve categories: intellectually impaired, visually impaired, hearing impaired, speech impaired, limb impaired, physically disabled, severely emotionally disordered, learning disabled, multiple impairments, autistic, developmentally delayed, and otherwise significantly disabled.
[7] Article 3 of the Law on the Protection of Persons with Physical and Mental Disabilities (身心障礙者保護法), as amended by the Legislative Council in Taiwan on 18 April 1997, divides persons with mental and physical disabilities into fourteen categories: visually impaired, hearing impaired, balance impaired, hearing or speech impaired, limb impaired, mentally impaired, people whose vital organs have diminished abilities, people with facial injuries, people in a vegetative state, people with dementia, people with autism, people with chronic mental illness, and people with multiple disabilities, and people with other disabilities recognized by the central health authorities.
[8] Lucy Ching, *One of the Lucky Ones* (London: Souvenir, 1982). Text translated from the Chinese version: 程文輝, *伴我同行* (浸信會出版社, 1989), 16–18. Lucy Ching was born in Guangzhou in the 1930s and later settled in the United States. When she was six months old, she suffered from an eye disease and went blind after being given the wrong medicine.
[9] The image is a faithful reproduction of a two-dimensional, public domain work of art. It is in the public domain in its country of origin, the United States, and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or less.

Interview with Yea-Hui Wang (王雅惠)

David Eastwood



David Eastwood has served for almost thirty years in Taiwan with OMF International. During that time his ministry has involved Bible teaching, evangelism, and leading church planting teams focused on Taiwan's working class. David initially trained at All Nations Christian College but has since completed studies with Singapore Bible College and Spurgeon's College, where the focus of his master's thesis was "Contextual preaching to the Taiwanese working class." He is currently the Field Director for OMF Taiwan.

David Eastwood provides background information that helps us better appreciate his conversation with Yea-Hui:

Yea-Hui only spent a few years as an OMF missionary in Taiwan. Shortly after her arrival, she had a fall and broke her good leg, which led to her being housebound. Even so, she impressed us all with her determination to exercise and regain her mobility. Yea-Hui demonstrated a deep love for people with disabilities that she and the Good Shepherd Church reached out to in Taichung and in a short time made a big difference to the lives of many both spiritually and practically in providing them with help, advice, and a community for mutual support.

In May 2016 Yea-Hui suffered a stroke which resulted in her being bedbound for many months. As it was not possible for her to continue in her ministry, she left OMF membership though she continues to live in Taiwan. While her health has improved, she no longer has the ability to drive a car or live independently. She continues to minister through Bible studies and one-to-one evangelism.

Can you tell us something about your family background and the situation in which you grew up? What particular challenges did you face? How did you overcome them?

I was born into a large family with two older brothers and two older sisters. My family followed traditional Chinese religions and there was an ancestor shelf in the home, but they were very open-minded and were not opposed to my becoming a Christian. My father was a doctor and the family placed a strong emphasis on education. I was diagnosed with polio when I was one year old. I am grateful to God that my family continued to encourage and support me. Their attitude was very different from that held by many families who have children with polio. Often such children were denied education and not expected to ever do anything other than simple work with their hands.

My disability was not severe, so I was able to go to ordinary school. Every time I left my home I would be teased and mocked by other children because I walked strangely. When I was in the first grade, my mother often visited the school to make sure I was being treated well. I remember often coming home and crying because of the cruelty of the other children. I asked my mother why she gave birth to a child like me. She encouraged me by telling me the story of Helen Keller. I decided that I would study hard and gain my sense of worth from my achievements. I worked hard at academic studies and was able to go to National Cheng Kung University in Tainan where I received a degree in history. I also dreamed of going overseas to study and was encouraged by my parents. I went to the US in 1981 to study for a master's degree in special education at Azusa Pacific University in Los Angeles.

How did you come to know Jesus and what changes did that bring into your life?

My first introduction to the gospel was while attending a kindergarten at the Taiping Jing Presbyterian Church. I remember participating in nativity plays during which we had to come and worship the baby Jesus. Later, at middle school, a Christian teacher shared the gospel with me and invited me to an evangelistic meeting. I heard the message of a Savior who doesn't judge or reject us because of outside appearance but who looks at the inside. All my life I had been rejected by people who just looked at the outside of



Holiday on Kinmen Island in June 2015

me so when I heard of Jesus who accepted me, loved me, and cared who I was on the inside, I was willing to accept him as my Savior. From that time on, I attended Kang Xi Jie Presbyterian church in Tainan. Both of the Presbyterian churches that I attended had strong links to one of the key pioneer missionaries to Taiwan—Dr. James Laidlaw Maxwell. His story, along with a biography of Dr. James Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, made a deep impression on me as a young Christian.

After I completed my MA studies in the US, I was praying about my future, not sure where I could be most used by God. During a time of prayer and fasting, the invitation of Matthew 6 to "seek first the kingdom of God" came as a challenge to me and led me to apply to Fuller Seminary with no idea of where the funding would come from. God generously supplied the funds needed through cheap accommodation supplied by a Christian from Taiwan, support from the Chinese church in Los Angeles, and a bursary from Fuller. After graduation I joined the staff of the Bread of Life Church in Los Angeles.

How did you become a missionary? What kind of work did you do and what results did you see?

After thirty years of study and ministry in the US, I felt the Lord challenging me. I thought of all the blessings I had received from my special upbringing in Taiwan and of the needs of people with disabilities like myself who lived there. It was so much easier to live with disabilities in the US. I felt a burden to return to Taiwan and help the people with disabilities who live there. I went to Taiwan as a missionary with OMF in 2012 and developed a partnership with a local church that was already involved in community outreach. We started classes within the church that were sponsored by the local government, to give people with disabilities a place to come and learn some simple handicrafts and also learn about the Bible.

Many with disabilities, especially those from working-class backgrounds, rarely leave their homes. We created a small community which was a place of support and fellowship for our contacts. In addition, we arranged outings and even a holiday for some of our contacts. This included organizing coaches and even boats that were adapted for wheelchair users and finding enough volunteers to ensure that every person was cared for. In some cases, these outings were the first time these contacts had been away from home on a long trip in many years. A short holiday to Kinmen Island off the coast of China gave many attendees their first chance to ride on an airplane and the first time to attend evening Bible studies and prayer times.

What were some of the most challenging things you faced in your ministry? What were some of the most rewarding things you experienced?

For me the biggest challenge of my time in this ministry was that of adjusting to the life of having a disability in Taiwan after so many years in the US. Practical issues like transport took up a lot of time. In the US, I was able to drive a specially adapted car. I had the same type of car in Taiwan but often found that even the disabled parking spots were not usable for someone who found getting in and out of a car difficult. Outside the home, it was often difficult to find a toilet that I could use. However, perhaps even harder to adjust to was the attitude of people. In the States, I was generally respected as someone who had worked hard to overcome a disability and do an ordinary job of a church worker. In Taiwan I felt people often only saw my disability.

One of the most rewarding things during any ministry is seeing someone come to the Lord. In one case, a teacher who, like myself, was disabled from polio, brought me particular joy. This man is often asked to speak on

In the States, I was generally respected as someone who had worked hard to overcome a disability and do an ordinary job of a church worker. In Taiwan I felt people often only saw my disability.

Missionaries with disabilities have to deal with a double cross-cultural challenge as they adjust to both the culture of the country they minister in and the culture of disabled people in that country.

and I feel that, in bringing him to the Lord, I was like Barnabas finding Paul and bringing him to Antioch to help with the ministry.

What would you like to say to others who are thinking about ministering to people with disabilities? What would you like to say to people with disabilities who are thinking about entering Christian ministry?

It is not an easy thing to consider the challenge of ministry to the disabled, especially if you are yourself disabled. You need to be brave and not be afraid. God will give you opportunities and will give you co-workers. God's grace will be with you even in the most difficult times. Those who are themselves disabled and considering work as a missionary need to prepare their hearts because people may look at you differently than they did in your home country and treat you differently than they treat other missionaries.

It is also possible that people with disabilities in the country where you go to serve may not accept you at first. They may have taken on board the values of the society they were raised in so that they lack a sense of self-worth and similarly reject other disabled people. Missionaries with disabilities have to deal with a double cross-cultural challenge as they adjust to both the culture of the country they minister in and the culture of disabled people in that country. **MRT**

OMF Taiwan would love to receive more workers like Yea-Hui with a heart for reaching out to Taiwan's physically and mentally disabled and the families that support them. While provisions for such families within the society have been improving, it is often the more educated, middle- and upper-class families that can take advantage of what the government provides. Our field focus on working class and marginalized people makes us very aware of how much the gospel and practical help are needed to change the lives of those who are often not valued even by their own families. A similar need can probably be found in every country in which OMF workers are ministering.



Outing to Sun Moon Lake in Central Taiwan in 2014

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Following in God's Way by Foot or by Chair

Walter McConnell



Walter directs OMF International's Mission Research Department. An American, he has previously served in Taiwan as a church planter and theological educator, taught Old Testament at Singapore Bible College where he also directed the Ichthus Centre for Biblical and Theological Research, and served as pastor at the Belfast Chinese Christian Church.

David Pickard



David and Sue joined OMF in 1970. He served at Manorom Christian Hospital as hospital administrator and coordinator of evangelism for patient follow-up in village evangelism and church planting. Sue was a medical doctor. He later served as the Thailand Field Director and was OMF's General Director from 1991-2001. The Pickards returned to the UK in 2002 from where they have continued to engage in international ministry.

And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. (Isa 30:21; KJV)

Jean Anderson had been looking forward to mission service with the China Inland Mission. In late 1950, having completed her nursing training and a further two-years' preparation at the CIM center in London, she was preparing to sail to China when the reality hit that the door to service in that great country had closed due to the Communist revolution. This Belfast girl now found herself, like many missionaries before and since, wondering what God would have her do now. Would he "open a window" for her to go through or had she run into a brick wall? It would take another two years before Jean knew that her path led to Thailand where she would do medical work with the newly reorganized mission, now called OMF. As stated in the key verse she chose for The Millions when she departed for Asia, "This is the way" would be the way of faith, the way of following her Lord.[1]

In 1953, Jean joined a group of doctors and nurses who had come to do medical work in central and southern Thailand. Some had previously served in hospitals in China, while others had come as "new workers". Notwithstanding their credentials or expertise, before any of them could practice medicine in Thailand they needed to learn a new language and culture. Many also had to adjust their bodies to the heat of their new tropical home as they adjusted their eyes and ears to new sights and sounds.

As soon as she arrived, Jean threw herself into Thai study at the language center in Bangkok. And even though she could say little, she eagerly joined others distributing tracts in the streets and markets. Little was she aware of the unexpected ways her desire to share the gospel with Thai people would be fulfilled in years to come. After language study, Jean served at an OMF clinic in Inburi, Central Thailand, where she further developed her nursing and language skills and where, as a member of a small church planting team, she gave herself to the prime need of sharing Jesus Christ with Thai people. For Jean, nursing and gospel ministry were inextricably linked. The medical teams that repeatedly visited patients and established clinics to help leprosy patients through the sometimes long—though not impossible—process of treatment, simultaneously explained the good news of Jesus Christ to them as it is the cure of a much more dangerous and deadly disease.

After her one-year home assignment in Belfast, Jean returned to serve the



For Jean, a strange headache, steadily-rising temperature, and overall bodily pains made it clear that something was wrong—seriously wrong. She had contracted polio.

people she had learned to love through nursing and gospel ministry. However, as the calendar turned to 1960, it became clear that leprosy wasn't the only disease that was widespread in the area and that foreign missionaries weren't immune. For Jean, a strange headache, steadily-rising temperature, and overall bodily pains made it clear that something was wrong—seriously wrong. She had contracted polio. Albert Gurtler, the doctor in charge of the Inburi clinic, knew something needed to be done quickly to get her to Bangkok where she could receive proper treatment. Prayer, in conjunction with a providential visit by American soldiers from a nearby military base who were looking for someone to lead a church service, resulted in a helicopter evacuation to Bangkok. Initial treatment there was followed by an R.A.F. ambulance flight to England and another flight a few days later back to Belfast accompanied by Dr. Catherine Maddox from Manorom Hospital who was then on home assignment.[2]

Another closed door?

Jean was now paralyzed from the hips down. Had her door to service in Asia closed again? Was the way barred? Instead of treating Thai patients, Jean was forced to endure four years of grueling rehabilitation. Instead of learning advanced nursing skills, she had to adjust to basic life skills performed from a wheelchair and learning to hobble on calipers with crutches. Despite the changes and challenges, she never lost hope that she had been headed in the right direction and that one day she would go back to Thailand to serve the Lord, even though confined to a wheelchair. Her requests to return forced field leadership to deliberate on just how someone who was a complete paraplegic could work under conditions that were difficult for people in the bloom of health. In the end, they opened the door for her to return and serve in a new way—not as a nurse but in the pathology laboratory, doing a job she could perform from a sitting position. So it was that Jean returned to central Thailand in 1964 to work at OMF's Manorom hospital.[3]

Manorom hospital

When my wife Sue and I (David) arrived in Thailand to work at Manorom Christian Hospital in 1970, it was the year of the great flood when the Chao Praya River overflowed its banks, covering the Central Thailand plain and leaving the hospital in the middle of a sea ten-feet deep. For ten weeks or so we travelled to and from home and hospital by boat. And as both houses and hospital were built on stilts ten feet high, the floodwater never quite reached the ground floor. As we boated our way to the hospital we had to step off the boat straight into the hospital building and the wards. What an exciting beginning to anyone's new venture for life—that is, so long as you were able bodied.

As a candidate preparing to go to Thailand, I heard many stories of Jean Anderson and of her indefatigable spirit and her powerful witness to the Lord. But with the flood that welcomed our arrival in Manorom, Jean was nowhere to be seen. A wheelchair-bound person could not simply hop in and out of boats. And for this reason, Jean had escaped to the safety of Bangkok before the floods broke. Even so, the impact of her presence was palpable, not only among the missionary and Thai staff, but also among the Thai patients.





Just who was this lady who was already a legend of a missionary? I wanted to meet the person behind the stories and discover for myself what made her tick. Two sets of obstacles and issues that needed to be surmounted became clear in my mind. On the one hand, was her physical and medical condition. On the other hand, were the cultural and religious perceptions of the Buddhist Thai people for whom disability was the evidence of poor karma. How, I wondered, had Jean overcome some of the missionary and cultural prejudices that she had encountered. How had her disability become an advantage or springboard for her testimony to the saving grace of God?

The way through physical and medical disability

To understand the immensity of the physical barriers faced by Jean, you have to imagine Thailand as it was fifty years ago when travel, resources, communications, and living circumstances were very basic. How could she survive in a wheelchair? How would she get around when no public conveyances were adapted for wheelchair disabilities? What would happen if a medical emergency should arise? And how could Jean be involved in the urgently needed work of urban and village evangelism? She had persuaded mission leaders and hospital staff to let her return to Thailand. Could she prove that disability was no drawback to effective living and witnessing for Christ? Could she lend a hand to meet the urgent need for itinerant preaching to the multitudes of unreached Thai who lived in rural villages at the end dusty dirt roads and often inaccessible tracks?



Retrospectively, the answer is amazingly simple. Jean's strong personality enabled her to be fiercely independent and her position in the hospital opened many doors that otherwise would have remained tightly closed. Though people regularly offered to push her around in her chair, Jean usually refused and wheeled herself around instead. She and her chair were such an institution that some patients who watched her whiz about concluded that she must be terribly rich, as the chair made it unnecessary for her to walk. And though, as we will see, Jean's access to village life wasn't totally severed, one can reach Thai village people when they come to you for medical care. The hospital wards thus provided ample opportunities for meeting patients and their relatives. It also made it possible to talk to them at a slower speed and build more measured relationships than could be done by passing through one village with an over-urgent need to get on to the next one. And what better place is there than a hospital where medical care is to hand and where a big support team is available?

Jean's grit and determination are also seen in her living situation. Though houses in central Thailand are usually built on stilts, Jean needed one that was at ground level as she could not climb stairs. Her house was known as Bahn Tia—short house—because it was only one-story high and not raised on stilts. And though this made life more convenient, the regular floods meant that Jean often had to move elsewhere, if not for the water, then for the snakes that invited themselves in when the floods were high. All single OMF workers at the time had roommates and house help. Jean was no exception, and in her case, it was particularly necessary both for safety's sake and because there were some things that she couldn't do for herself. But as Jean was a great organizer, the girls who lived with her needed to be willing to be organized.

The way through misunderstanding and prejudice

While Jean's polio required a different lifestyle than she had known before, it also freed her to do something that hospital medical personnel were too busy to do. Originally returning to work in Manorom hospital's laboratory, she ended up serving the hospital as OMF's "wheelchair evangelist".[4] Every day she made her rounds of the wards to visit all the new patients. Every time someone showed interest in hearing the gospel she was sure to return and talk to them regularly so that they could better understand what was to them a new message about Jesus and what he had come to earth to do. But her work wasn't exhausted by ward visits, as she also frequently took part in the regular morning preaching session held in the out-patients' department. Both foreign and local staff participated in this evangelistic outreach at the hospital, whether by singing, praying, preaching, selling Scriptures and other Christian literature, or simply talking to people where they were. As recorded by Jean, through this team ministry, "A prayer goal of one conversion each week became a reality."[5]

While Jean's chair set her apart, it wasn't the only thing that did so. When Jean first returned to Thailand she waited for one whole month in Bangkok for her Austin Mini—fully equipped with hand controls for a paraplegic driver—to arrive and pass through customs. As the hospital evangelist, Jean needed the car so that she could regularly visit former patients who lived in the surrounding villages. However, as there was always a possibility that something might happen to the car along the way, someone was required to travel with her when she went out. Riders soon learned that since she was a fearless driver, they needed to be equally fearless, as car and driver had gained the renown of Jehu and his chariot.

Former Manorom doctor Grace Pettigrew remembers that when she was new to Thailand she accompanied Jean to a small town about fifteen miles away to visit a Sala church where her more experienced colleague was scheduled to lead the service.[6] The drive in the Mini was a hair-raising experience, as Jean flew down the road, deftly navigated a route across a busy, four-lane highway, and headed down another road where she ran over a light-colored band stretching all the way across the tarmac that proved to be a straying python. No matter the obstacle, Jean kept right on rolling to ensure they would get to the service on time.

The presence and actions of this formidable lady raised a lot of interest among Thai people and thus brings us to a consideration of the cultural obstacles that she faced. From an early age, all Thai know the saying, "Do good get good, do bad get bad." How did Jean work through the instinctive prejudice exhibited by a worldview that regards suffering in the negative context of bad karma? How would people respond to a woman who had suffered a debilitating illness while pursuing the good of others and continued to serve others in spite of her limitations?

Jean was able to look at and explain things from a totally different perspective, and would tell her listeners that we are not subject to the twists and turns of circumstances so that all that happens to us is the consequences of past deeds. And as she would explain, the cross of Jesus, which is the ultimate example of suffering and indignity, has become the

While Jean's polio required a different lifestyle than she had known before, it also freed her to do something that hospital medical personnel were too busy to do.

The fact that Jean would, by the very nature of things, not "talk down" to the patients but "talk to" them at their own level—from her wheelchair to their bedside—provided a very down to earth opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ.

place of greatest victory and triumph. One could hope for no better team member than one who had turned adversity on its head so that it became a springboard for effective living and witnessing for Jesus Christ. This was particularly important in those early days in central Thailand when there was so much to bring discouragement.

The church was small and believers few in number, and Thai people were mainly unresponsive to the gospel. Yet, Jean's testimony and perspective as to what can be done encouraged many to press on cheerfully and uncomplainingly. The fact that the Lord had not healed Jean was no barrier to her serving him fruitfully. I (David) remember Jean telling me what someone had told her when she contracted polio, "God must have trusted you, Jean, to accept from him this disability and know that he could use you through it." When I asked Jean, "Do you think what happened to you changed your understanding of God in any way?" she replied: "I have learnt lessons about the Lord that I could not have learnt in any other way."

And while this was noticed by many Thai, it was particularly clear to the leprosy patients. As people who had been marginalized, ostracized, and feared by society, these patients instinctively knew that Jean's disability put her in a position where she could identify with them in their disabilities and found that her message gave them dignity. Her disability thus significantly reduced the distance that often exists between the speaker of the gospel and their listeners. Indeed, in a culture that reveres respect, the fact that Jean would, by the very nature of things, not "talk down" to them but "talk to" them at their own level—from her wheelchair to their bedside—provided a very down to earth opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ. As Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). When non-Christians see how Christians love and care for each other, they are moved to want to listen to the gospel more clearly. When Christian love extends to the lowliest and neediest and disabled, it compels many to trust in the God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be its Savior.

Thai patients come to Christ and serve the church

The love that Christian medical personnel demonstrated by coming to Thailand to establish hospitals and heal marginalized and forgotten people created a unique church-planting experience which resulted in the first Christians and churches in central Thailand being made up of people with leprosy and their family members. While many Thai would express thanks to the foreign missionaries for bringing education and medicine to their country, they weren't interested in the foreign religion as they had no sense of sin and, therefore, no understanding that they needed a Savior. Those with leprosy differed from their compatriots because they knew they had great needs and felt unworthy to have anyone do anything for them. Their incredulity that missionaries would come to see them, touch them—especially their deformed feet as that was the most degrading thing in their culture—and heal them, opened the way so that when they heard the gospel, they knew it spoke to them.

People from the leprosy community met in what became known as Sala churches. In Thailand, a Sala is an open-sided thatched shelter. Adopted as a place to hold leprosy clinics, they later served as church buildings for people with leprosy. The term gained currency because it did away with any reference to the dreaded disease. In part, this was due to the fact that a high percentage of "well" people had unreasonable fears about being together with people who had leprosy. When churches were planted for Thai with no connection to leprosy, distinctions were often made between the "Sala church" and the "well church". This was particularly true in country areas. It took until 1977 before Sala churches and well churches united in worship, a unity that was delayed due to the fears of the "well" Christians and in order to prevent the infection from spreading.

As Thai people with leprosy grew in their faith, they began to minister to their own people.[7] From the very beginning, they helped with evangelistic services held in the Sala clinics. Many returned to their communities to help found churches. In the Manorom church and farther afield, many leprosy patients became church leaders and gained wide respect for their preaching and other gifts. Some excelled as musicians and wrote some of the famous early Thai hymns that have become a wonderful legacy for the Thai Christian church. Their disease gave them the opportunity to hear of Jesus, respond



to him, and serve him and their fellow people through gospel ministry. Far from contracting leprosy due to their bad deeds, it came so that "the works of God might be displayed" in them (John 9:3) and that Jesus might give them life to the full (John 10:10).

Who else will join the likes of Jean Anderson, the foreign and local staff of Manorom hospital, the patients made well in body and soul, and the many others who have heard the voice of God say, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isa 30:21)?

Who else will walk in this way?

When the door to ministry in China was slammed in her face, Jean Anderson could have given up. When polio performed its most wretched work on her body, she could have packed it all in. But instead, she pressed on, believing that the one who said "This is the way" would see her through and give her strength to light a lamp in the darkness that would attract many Thai to the true God in whom they would believe and serve for their eternal benefit and his supreme glory. Though Jean retired from overseas ministry in 1986, the needs of the world loom as large as ever. Who else will join the likes of Jean Anderson, the foreign and local staff of Manorom hospital, the patients made well in body and soul, and the many others who have heard the voice of God say, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isa 30:21)? Will you step out in faith, regardless that the Lord might bring along what the previous verse calls the "bread of adversity and … water of affliction" (Isa 30:20; ESV)? Will you reach out to others so that they might learn that he is the way and come to know him? Will you walk this way in faith so that others will have an opportunity to walk this way too? **MRT**

[1] "Booked to Sail for Southeast Asia," *The Millions*, British ed. (January 1953): 7.

[2] The outline of this story is in "News from Home and Abroad: Miss Jean Anderson," *China's Millions*, British ed. (April 1960): 37.

[3] The story of the early years of Manorom hospital is told in Catherine Maddox, *Paddy Field Hospital* (London: CIM, 1961). A memorial of its first fifty years is recorded in the Thai/English publication, Manorom Christian Hospital, *50 ปี โรงพยาบาลคริสเตียนมโนรมย์ 1956-2006, 50 Years of Manorom Christian Hospital* (Nakhon Sawan, Thailand: Manorom Christian Hospital, 2006).

[4] See the chapter "Wheelchair Evangelist" in Rose Dowsett and Chad Berry, *God's Faithfulness: Stories from the China Inland Mission and OMF* (Borough Green: OMF, 2014), 197–203.

[5] *50 Years of Manorom Christian Hospital*, 42.

[6] From personal conversation.

[7] Some former leprosy patients found jobs at Manorom hospital where they were healed and found Christ. See Angie Chang, "From Light through Darkness into Hope," *Mission Round Table* 11 vol. 2 (May-August 2016): 27–9.

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus

Claire McConnell

> Turn your eyes upon Jesus
> Look full in His wonderful face
> And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
> In the light of His glory and grace
> – Lauren Daigle

These words remind us of the words in Hebrews "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb 12:2–3, NIV). These verses have been a wonderful encouragement to many over the centuries to keep going in tough times and circumstances.

What does it mean to fix our eyes upon Jesus? Here were some thoughts which I hope will encourage us all at a time of world and personal difficulty.

Some know what it is like to move to a new place and have no language—you feel helpless like a baby, frustrated because you could do so much more before—fix your eyes on a baby in a manger who was the Creator, who was worshipped in heaven, whose words brought the universe into being, who also has to learn how to speak.

When tempted in many ways—look at Jesus wandering in the desert being tempted by the devil.

When we think we have given up much or could have so much more if we were back home or doing another job—look at Jesus who says, "foxes have holes and the birds of the air a nest but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

When we are hurt because family and friends don't understand what we are doing—look at Jesus as his mother and brothers come to him to take him home because they think he's mad.

When we are angry with our colleagues or others—look at Jesus teaching that anger is as bad as murder.

When there are disagreements and disunity—look at Jesus on the night he was betrayed, praying that we may be one as he and the Father are one.

When Satan accuses us (often rightly) of our sin—look at Jesus who says "It is finished."

When we feel that those we serve don't appreciate us—look at Jesus who came to his own but his own did not receive him.

When we are mocked and ridiculed—look at Jesus with the crowd crying "crucify."

When we stand at the funeral of a loved one—look at Jesus, risen and glorious, who has conquered death.

When we look at ourselves or others and see the ugliness and imperfections—look at Jesus by whom and through whom all things have been made.

When the good news we share is rejected by someone we care about—look at Jesus as the rich young ruler turns away.

When we sit with our family and friends enjoying a wonderful meal—look at Jesus feasting with sinners and tax collectors or cooking a breakfast on the beach for his disciples.

When things are too hard for us and we feel overwhelmed by what God is asking us to do or go through—look at Jesus in the garden, sweating drops of blood and asking if he might not drink the cup, saying, "not my will but yours."

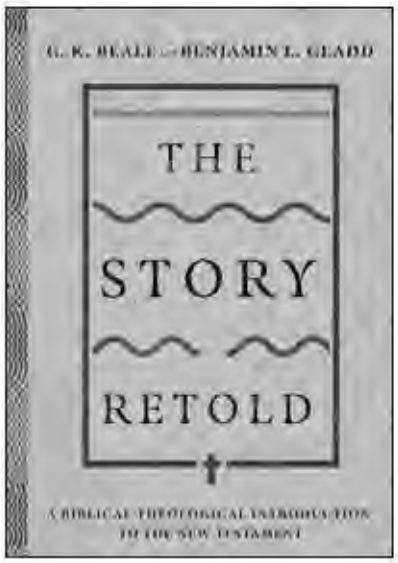
When we wonder if it's all worth it—look at Jesus seated in glory and consider the glory that he has waiting for us.

When we wonder if he loves us because of all the things that are happening in our lives or the lives of those we love—look at Jesus on the cross.

So much more could be said. But spend a few minutes in silent prayer and look at Jesus in all of our current situations because in reality he is already there.

The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament

By G. K. Beale and Benjamin Gladd. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8308-5266-6. 560pp.
Reviewed by Martin Paterson



Why does the world need another NT introduction? With so many volumes that provide helpful explanation of the historical and theological context of the NT, this may seem unnecessary. However, *The Story Retold* by G. K. Beale and Benjamin Gladd does not fall into this category. In fact, it is a unique contribution as it provides something not addressed by other NT introductions that I can think of: it (1) roots the NT in the context of the OT, and (2) demonstrates how the NT uses the OT and how that should influence our reading of the whole of Scripture.

The book begins with two chapters handling the storyline of the Bible and the NT use of the OT. Both provide helpful guidance by laying out the necessary foundations for accessing the intricate tapestry of the Bible. A particularly good feature is the simple and accessible way the authors define and outline important terms in the study of the NT use of the OT, such as allusion, typology, quotation, and fulfilment.

The bulk of the book examines each of the books of the NT sequentially. (The exception is that 2 Peter and Jude are examined together.) In line with their intended outcome to serve the preaching and teaching of the church, Beale and Gladd comment on key biblical-theological themes found in each book. At the same time, they discuss the way the OT has been used in each context. Though these discussions are limited, they offer a great starting point for further reading into how a certain author, gospel, or section has engaged with the OT.

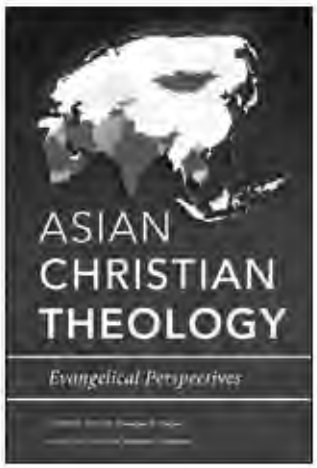
For example, in handling the final words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, the authors show the interconnectedness of the Great Commission (Matt 28:16–20) with Genesis 1:26–28; Daniel 7:13–14; and 2 Chronicles 36:23. Each of these passages is related to building the place where God will be glorified through the worship of his people. Drawing on the threads of 2 Chronicles 36:23, Beale and Gladd show the importance of typology, stating that "The great commission is proclaimed by the true, divine king Jesus to true Israel, the disciples" (68). Another good example of this is how Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:1–5:21, draws on Genesis 1 and Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 to discuss the dark to light transformation of the new age which has come in Christ. They note that "paradoxically, transforming into the image of the last Adam takes place through suffering. Just as Jesus' own life is characterised by suffering climaxing in his physical resurrection, so it is the case with his people. What is true of God is true of his people" (238).

This introductory text contains a number of pictures and diagrams, some of which are more helpful than others. Since discussions surrounding date, authorship, purpose, and context are brief, a companion NT introductory volume would be helpful. However, as this was not the intended focal point of this volume, the lack is not a failing.

The Story Retold is an excellent book which will prove an important contribution to biblical studies for the next couple of decades. If you are involved in theological education, this is the sort of volume that would be a good introduction for students. Pastors, church planters, and Bible teachers would also benefit, as its great overviews of NT books will aid preparation of sermons and teaching series. It would be a great resource to have available at mission centres around the world to help sharpen and encourage our engagement with the NT use of the OT, and as such, our communication of the gospel. This is a significant work and I am grateful that both Beale and Gladd gave their time to the church to develop this resource.

Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives

By Timoteo D. Gener and Stephen T. Pardue, eds. Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2019. ISBN 978-1-78368-643-8. 376pp.
Reviewed by Nathan Keller



As an American cross-cultural missionary who has lived in Asia for twelve years, I have learned much about the importance of understanding the culture of the people with whom I share the gospel. Having said this, I recognize that I have even more to learn, and I seek every opportunity to do so. Therefore, when I came across *Asian Christian Theology*, something within called out, "You need to read this book!"

In the introduction, the editors note that most evangelical scholarship is Western and that efforts need to be made to support "the flourishing of evangelical theology in the Asian church" (1). To that end, this book is composed of sixteen essays written by Asian theologians and is intended "to offer an approach to Christian theology that is biblically rooted, historically aware, contextually engaged, and broadly evangelical" (2), four criteria that are met in most, but not all, of the essays.

The first eight essays deal with traditional doctrinal themes of evangelical theology: divine revelation, Scripture, the Trinity, Christology, creation, the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology, and eschatology. The authors of each of these essays express theological truth through the perspective of their own cultural and historical frameworks. The last eight essays deal with practical issues that are relevant to the Asian church: suffering, cultural identity, religious pluralism, sacred vs. public living, diaspora communities, Asian religious experience, rapidly changing culture, and reconciliation. These essays provide many case studies of how to live God-honoring lives in the midst of difficult non-Christian and anti-Christian environments.

The contributors are highly educated Asian evangelical theologians. From what I was able to discern, four are Filipinos, four are Indian, two are Singaporean, two are

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Café and Education Ministry for People with Special Needs

Joyous and Hopeful

Joyous is an experienced secondary school teacher who has served in Sunday school ministry for more than three decades. Hopeful has extensive work experience in IT and served in church in the areas of discipling and training for a good number of years.

In East Asia, there is a great need to educate the general public about accepting people with special needs. The authorities in our city have labelled this group "disabled". The society at large is not ready to embrace them. It is nearly impossible for this group of people to find jobs here as employers are unwilling to hire them even for simple jobs like packing and cleaning in shops. Many family members feel ashamed to bring them out to interact with others. The public schools for people with special needs have limited vacancies and resources to educate and train these students. As a result, a huge majority have never acquired the basic life skills to take care of themselves and there is little hope for them to improve the quality of their lives. Many remain at home where they continue to be a burden on their families.

His calling

Who can help this group of people and give them hope in life? Who is to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to this neglected and unreached people? Under the strong conviction of the Holy Spirit, we began to see with increasing clarity that we are called to serve them in this foreign land. We are indeed thankful and joyful to receive God's clear direction to set up an employment platform and a learning support centre for people with special needs. As we look back, we realise God had prepared us for this ministry in our home church where we started a special needs Sunday School seven years ago. It was only after serving at home for five years that we embarked on this mission journey.

His ministry

Our café is a take-away eatery serving toast, cream puffs, ice cream, fruit juice, and other beverages. It is situated in the shopping area in the city centre, on the second storey of a building with many restaurants. It occupies 32 square meters and has a small seating capacity. During weekends and public holidays, the place is crowded with diners. This business is ideal as the start-up costs were not too high and the monthly rent was manageable. The potential for making the business sustainable looked promising, as footfall in the area is quite good. After six months in business, we started to break even, and are making a small profit today. This business style is also ideal because the skills required by our workers with special needs are not too complex.

The café family

In the first six months of running the business, we witnessed to twenty-three workers, some of whom were university students. Some of these heard the name of Jesus for the first time in their lives and quickly understood why we started this business. They were touched by the love we showed and developed a willingness to work alongside others with special needs. Currently, we have a steady work force of five workers. Two of them are mentally challenged and one is physically disabled. One worker is the mother of a mentally-challenged worker.

Our lives, the message

The lives of these workers with special needs changed drastically after working in the café. They received their very first pay checks in their lives and have become able to support themselves financially. As we work and live with them like a close-knit family, we are able to show Christ in us and send a strong message to them. Our lives are the message. Many times they asked about our faith and were keen to know about Jesus and the stories from the Bible. Discussing the Bible became part of the daily routine in the shop. One of our male physically-challenged employees was baptized in December 2019. Two other workers have since accepted Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour. Whenever

The lives of these workers with special needs changed drastically after working in the café. They received their very first pay checks in their lives and have become able to support themselves financially. As we work and live with them like a close-knit family, we are able to show Christ in us and send a strong message to them. Our lives are the message.



we received delivery orders, our workers acknowledged that it is God who supplied and thanked the Lord for giving us business. We praise God for giving us a safe platform to share his love freely so that our workers are able to meet Jesus. Lives are indeed changed and improved here, as our workers not only earn money, they also find salvation, joy, confidence, purpose, and direction in their lives.

Multiplication

So far, all of our workers have been able to meet every order independently as they are simple to fill. If there is a need to expand the ministry in the future to benefit more people with special needs, our current workers are confident that they can train other workers in the new outlets. Training people who would like to run similar businesses is also a priority. To date, we have provided learning experiences for four people from two countries. Each of them spent one to two months in our food outlet, learning all the baking skills needed as well as the know-how to run a business in a foreign country. This training included working with regular workers and those with special needs. It also gave them a chance to experience life in this city and to interact with a like-minded community. After being equipped, they have had ample time to determine whether this is a calling that they would like to follow. We are glad we have helped prepare them for this kind of ministry and hope that they will come on board. The ground is ready for multiplication and we are waiting for more support for this kingdom business.

Stable workforce

As both of us were previously not from the food industry and the business world, we learnt many lessons in this new adventure. Though working in the café is both simple and enjoyable, we experienced a high turnover of twenty-three workers during our first six months of business. It is difficult to hold onto workers here as turnover is high due to family reasons and study commitments. It was only when we started hiring workers with special needs and their family members that our workforce stabilised. Hiring high-functioning special needs workers is manageable. Most of them took about two months to gain independence. Although they may make little mistakes every now and then, it was not too much trouble to rectify them. We work in the shop like a family working together. Workers joyfully come to work every day.

Right products for the customers at the right location

A second lesson that we learned was that although location is very important for retail businesses, launching suitable products is equally or perhaps more important for the success of a business. As our outlet is in the midst of established restaurants, a take-away counter serving toast may not be the most ideal here. The customers are less inclined to look for bread when they are surrounded by a great assortment of restaurants. Moreover, bread is not the staple food here. We noticed that people coming from bigger metropolitan cities are more interested in bread. They found our toast to be very good and often suggested that we start a similar business in their cities. Even though our products are healthier than most food found in this city, as they are less oily, spicy, and salty, people here are not ready to buy the idea of eating healthily. However, as good stewards, we insisted on using little oil and no food colouring, preservatives, or other additives designed to enhance flavour. Healthier corn oil and fresh fruits are used to prepare all our products, hence we have gained some loyal, returning customers. Most of our income comes from the sale of fruit juice. Small items like eggettes seem to sell better than toast too. To survive in this highly competitive market, we must be flexible, agile, and responsive to our customers while ensuring that we provide healthy, quality products.

Those who desire to open a take-away food retail business will find that it will be better if the outlet is located at the street level. The location of a delivery-only business can be more flexible as long as the shop is close to a high-density residential or office area. In addition, selling staple food items like rice, fried rice, or rice noodles is more likely to garner high business volume.

The centre is equipped with many teaching aids suitable for cognitive development and equipment for sensory integration. There is also a kitchen and laundry area for imparting life skills … Our teachers conduct therapy sessions through sand play and music. On top of these, we provide assessment services and other activities like roller blading courses to enhance learning support to the students.

Special needs learning support centre

There are at least 10,000 people with special needs in this city but there are only three public schools available for them. These schools only take in very high-functioning children, making it impossible for less-abled children to enter

A people-focused model for business has a bright future in many countries. This is especially true as wealth in the country increases and it becomes more developed.

the special-needs schools here. As a result, many of these people receive no professional intervention and education. In addition, the schools here do not take in students who are eighteen years old and above. We saw a great need to set up an early intervention centre to help young kids as well as provide training and equipping in vocational and life skills for those who are eighteen years old and above. A private learning centre for people with special needs was established in the last quarter of 2019 to meet these needs.

Small setup for easy multiplication

The learning centre occupies an area of 95 square meters and can take in a maximum of fifteen students at any one time. We intended it to be a small centre so that we would not be too burdened financially and would not attract unnecessary attention. If there is a need to expand, we could also easily multiply with another small setup. One special-needs educator and two occupational therapists who share our vision work at the centre. Recently, we employed a local lady part-time to assist the teachers.

Professional consultancy with God's love

The centre is equipped with many teaching aids suitable for cognitive development and equipment for sensory integration. There is also a kitchen and laundry area for imparting life skills. In the future, we hope to prepare some of these students to enter the work force. Our teachers conduct therapy sessions through sand play and music. On top of these, we provide assessment services and other activities like roller blading courses to enhance learning support to the students. We are different from the other three special-needs schools currently available in the city. Our teachers have many years of professional experience and teach with abundant love. Parents testified that their kids demonstrated significant positive change after attending a few lessons with our teachers. Students made remarkable improvement in areas like concentration, speech, communication, and behaviour.

We praise God for bringing students to our centre. Although we have been in business for only three months, we are already facing a shortage of manpower. It is our desire to appeal for physiotherapists and speech therapists to join us in this meaningful ministry. We intend to provide a counselling service for the parents of our students if we can get qualified counsellors to join our team. We can then interact more with the parents and provide holistic support for these families.



Building sustainability and meeting needs

Many single-income families cannot afford to pay school fees for special-needs education. One school in a nearby town is charging a sizeable fee for a service that is similar to the one we provide. But even though we capped our school fees at about one-fifth of the other school in order make it possible for more students to attend, many find it to be a heavy burden. Supporting such families financially has become a challenge for us. As this is operated using a business model, we need to justify our existence by making enough profit to be viable.

Conclusion

A people-focused model for business has a bright future in many countries. This is especially true as wealth in the country increases and it becomes more developed. Our business ventures focusing on people with special needs provide them with a livelihood and offer appropriate intervention for them and their families so that they receive hope. We are proud to send a strong message to potential employers that many people with special needs are capable of working and they should not be deprived of job opportunities. While we have explored the possibility of working with local bodies to operate these two businesses, they are not yet ready to take on this task. This will not stop us from empowering people where we live by transferring our know-how, vision, and mission. One day, when the time is right, we believe that God will move local people to join in his work here and outside of their nation.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and *puts them into practice* is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24, italics added).
MRT

Fish out of Water

Erin Amaris Hendrikse

Erin is a TCK who is currently living in her home country where she is finishing her studies.

My family spent fifteen years on the field, a time that was painfully rich. I often describe our relationship with the country as like the ocean—so beautiful, vast, powerful, and deep. It can be rough and grey or clear and green.

My parents brought me to Asia when I was one year and my sister one month old. Many ask which country feels more like home. I can't say my parents' country. I don't know it well enough. So many assume I find my adopted country to be the most homely. But it's not. It's just a more familiar place.

Growing up in this setting, I discovered that there are two types of MKs—the ones who integrate well and become locals, and the ones who live in a bubble. Unfortunately, my sister and I, along with many of our friends, were among the latter. I only started to venture beyond the bubble when I reached fifteen, with only a year left in the country. The reason for the seclusion was that we were forced to attend an international school. In the country where we lived, it is extremely rare for an MK to attend a local government school, so making friends with locals doesn't come easy. When you're young, school life takes up almost all your time. And when I got to spend time with local friends, they mainly wanted to immerse themselves in English language and culture. Mind you, I felt like a foreign fish on land—one that was hardly seen before, and thus a curious specimen.

This ties in with church life. Many international churches are set up to accommodate expats. They run English services the way they are run in the West and are attended by many missionary families. Though I felt we were supposed to live up to the romanticised, integrated life of Hudson Taylor, we often fell short. So, for the whole family, going to local village churches together was an occasional event. Even though my dad worked in them every week, the village churches were a rare excursion for my sister and me. It was only when I grew older that I really began to appreciate the work my parents did. Early on, I dreaded going to the villages where it was hot, there weren't any proper toilets, and I didn't understand the language. The only thing I enjoyed was the food.

> *I discovered that there are two types of MKs—the ones who integrate well and become locals, and the ones who live in a bubble.*

The people were friendly. They were respectful. They treated my family as honored guests, as was customary for foreigners. And they were passionate. The whole small congregation prayed with eyes shut tight. When they sang, they jumped and laughed and cried. When they listened to the sermon, they took it all in. That too, I learned to appreciate. And it was these factors that set them apart from the international English church I went to regularly: the servant heart, the respect, the passion. But these factors did not come into play when it came to my sister's disability.

In the country we lived in, disabilities were, in general, taboo. Hearing this shouldn't be a big surprise; it's almost expected. But witnessing it at ground level is something else. I remember when I started high school, I had to move to a new school campus. So, my whole family moved away from the city center and into a predominantly Christian neighborhood in the suburbs. For as much as I can recall, this was the first time I saw a local child with Down's syndrome. She was the daughter of our neighbor. While the other kids went fishing in the gutters, she spent her days alone in her garden. Her only companions were her mother and an old metal swing set, tarnished to a rusty red from the monsoon rains. She hardly ever went out because her family was ashamed for her to be seen. She had nowhere to go. Schooling was not an option. She was distanced from the neighbors, as if we didn't exist. This girl was tied to her family and was believed to be the result of bad karma that had come around to bite them on the ankle.

Around the time we moved out of the city, my sister and I took lessons at a small music school set up in a house, run by a local musician. This man had an older brother who was autistic and left to his care. Each week I saw this grown man through a crack of a deep, red curtain under the stairwell, giggling. The man was positioned on a bamboo reed mat, protected from public eyes. In his own world, he was safe from outside trouble and from the trouble he could have been if not kept

A lot of the time, I caught myself bargaining with God. "I'll do this if you take it away." These thoughts came to mind because I was falling in line with the essential beliefs of the local community that held that human actions determine fate.

in. Even though our music teacher was a strong Christian who was a church musician, I would never have known of his special brother if my eyes hadn't wandered to his hiding place.

My mom always had great sympathy for such children—the ones stuck in time and space. They belonged nowhere and were wanted by no one. Since life is such a limited resource, we are often reminded to think of our priorities. Do I work now or play? Should I go or stay? Should I aid or ignore? These people made me think of priorities we battled with due to the world around us. They reminded me of the constant battle between serving self and others. For in the country where we lived, the culture lays social pressure on the people like a heavy blanket. My mom thinks that's why the locals hide their disabled family members. It helps them avoid the emotional humiliation of being exposed.

But it is not only the local people who have to face disability. My sister was diagnosed with epilepsy when she was four years old, a condition that throws her into random, unprovoked seizures, and causes the muscles of her body to stiffen and jerk uncontrollably. In the beginning, she had one seizure a year, at night. As she grew older, the seizures happened more frequently and came during the day as well. Most seizures happened at home. But when they came at school, teachers and a trained nurse were needed to rush in and take care of things. Other seizures came in public places. I remember one that came while we were on one of the field's annual retreats in a different city. As it came unexpectedly on the parents' prayer night and kids' movie night, I had to handle it myself, with the slight help of the child-minders who were on hand.

We always noted how her seizures were so, … inconveniently timed. For example, one came during a church service, right before my father went up to preach. It was an open-aired place but we took her to the back room of the church and not many noticed. Some of those who did, helped in ways they could. Others just stared, forming a curious and foreboding circle around us. I waited on the other side of the door, putting up a physical and mental barrier to the situation. In such a situation, the mental, emotional, and spiritual strain is honestly harder than the physical burden.

My sister's epileptic condition has taken a toll on my family, especially my parents. When you're on the field, you're miles away from any extended family. My parents would often talk of feeling depleted after a seizure. We dealt with her condition by ourselves, on our own. This has brought us very close as a family. The help we received from others was mainly the promise of prayer from home and other members of our team. There wasn't much else that could be done and what could be done, my mother did herself.

My sister's condition made learning at a regular school difficult. She had learning difficulties that needed specialized attention that was not available in mainstream education. My mom found a small, local education center that used a system that catered to an individual's ability. This was great for my sister because it allowed her to learn at, well, her own pace, without the pressures that a normal school would bring. The school also had a few other children with learning difficulties. My sister made a lot of progress under this educational system, though the school was very small. Soon thereafter, my mother co-founded the first Christian international school licensed to use the Cambridge Syllabus and exams. In 2016, it kicked off its first year with my sister as one of their first batch of students. In this way, my mother could keep an eye on her while at school. It also provided a safe place for my sister to feel somewhat normal. I joined in 2017 to start my IGCSE. The large majority of students were Christians and Christian principles were practiced and taught weekly. In previous years, when we both attended other secular schools, each time my sister had a seizure, the nurse and I helped out, and my parents only showed up later. But at the new school, the students, the teachers, the staff, and my mom all helped as much as they could. There was a great sense of community and care. And even though we were miles from good medical support, the acceptance was comforting and we greatly appreciated it.

A lot of the time, I have felt that my sister's seizures were just a part of my life. But then a lot of the time, I caught myself bargaining with God. "I'll do this if you take it away." These thoughts came to mind because I was falling in line with the essential beliefs of the local community that held that human actions determine fate. Your sin alone is the cause of your discomfort. How narrow-minded. John 9:3 puts things into perspective for me.

Though we may hide (or feel the need to hide) our supposed flaws, we should instead redirect them so that the works of the Lord may be displayed.

> "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

The so-called thorns God puts in our lives were not put there because of sin but are there for the glory of God, and we should respond to them accordingly. My sister has inspired and encouraged, both despite and through her condition, keeping us humble and close to God, reminding us why we were on the field to begin with. It challenged us and I hope you as well.

Though we may hide (or feel the need to hide) our supposed flaws, we should instead redirect them so that the works of the Lord may be displayed. **MRT**

"He has delivered my soul in peace"

The Life and Ministry of Allison Butler

Marjorie (Butler) Keeble



It has been a privilege to write the story of my mother Allison Butler to encourage others who feel their disabilities may limit their service for the Lord. Nothing overshadowed the prayerful and practical love our mother had for her four children. Each of us has continued to serve the Lord as we have been enabled. After university, I taught at high school before marrying Russell. When we moved nearer Hamilton, I introduced the Know Your Bible method of Bible study to the area. I continued teaching until Russell suffered a major stroke and I then nursed him until his death three years later. I was already a lay preacher and was able to continue my theological studies and become the Pastoral Assistant. I continued church work, leading Bible studies, and served as Secretary of the Rural Australians for Refugees group. As the family historian, I transcribed 1000 pages of our father's letters from China before I retired at 78 to South Australia.

Allison Pike was born in 1907, the eldest of five children born to Douglas and Louisa (née Boulter) Pike, Australian CIM missionaries who worked in Guizhou Province of southwest China from 1902. In all his twenty-seven years in China, Douglas only had two furloughs, the second being in 1924–5 when he and Louisa took Allison and eldest son Doug to Australia on completion of their schooling at the Chefoo School.[1] Two other children, Walter and Faith, were left at the Chefoo School in Yantai, in accordance with CIM policy at the time, but Faith, aged eleven, died of TB the day her parents left Melbourne to return to China.[2] Despite this tragedy, Allison recorded that "in her time in hospital three people came to the Lord through her bright testimony." A fifth child, Alf, followed the other children by a few years.

While in Australia, Allison graduated as a triple-certificated nurse, studied at the Melbourne Bible Institute, and completed a course in Business Studies. In 1929, her father was captured and killed by bandits in China,[3] and not long after, Allison applied to the CIM to become one of the two hundred recruits that the mission was calling for.[4] She was accepted and returned to China to study at language school before returning to Guizhou where she was able to work with her mother Louisa.

Allison was grateful for the effort made by Rowland Butler in searching for the body of her father and wrote to thank him. Rowland was born in 1905 and came from a Christian family in Adelaide. In 1928, he became a missionary with the CIM and served in Guizhou. He and Allison met at the wedding of fellow CIMers, Alfred and Rose Bosshardt,[5] in June 1931, and a letter-writing romance followed. At the time, civil weddings had to be held in Chungking (Chongqing), a 450-kilometer journey from Guizhou, and travel was dangerous due to bandits. Allison and Rowland were married there in March 1933 and were able to spend an extended honeymoon in the hills near Chongqing as Rowland was asked to accompany a group of new missionaries on their way by foot to Guizhou in the south.

Unfortunately, on the way, Allison was taken ill and suffered a miscarriage. Because of his responsibilities for



The Pike Family (c.1918). From the left: Walter, Faith, Douglas (Snr.), Louisa and Alf, Douglas (Jr.), and Allison.





Pictures of Allison in *China's Millions*, Australasian edition (1930): 151–2. In the photograph taken with other new Australian missionaries, Allison is in the middle row, second from the left.

the inexperienced group he was accompanying, Rowland could not remain with Allison, and she had to be carried by four men on a stretcher for four days to the hospital. Fortunately, they managed to avoid trouble, although Rowland and his group faced difficulties from bandits.

Rowland and Allison were stationed in Dushan where the widowed Louisa continued to serve as a Bible teacher and nurse for a further fifteen years. When I visited the church there in 2005, the elderly ladies with whom Louisa had worked wept for a long time as they told stories of the wonderful work she and Allison had done among them.

A busy life followed for the Butlers as they planted churches in Guiding and Duyun, and Rowland, at the young age of thirty-six, became Superintendent for Guizhou. They then lived in the capital Guiyang where Allison managed the mission home, did a lot of nursing, and cared for their three children Keith, Gwyneth, and me—Marjorie. Rowland's work required much travel away from home which was originally by foot, then by bicycle, and eventually by bus and car.

From the late 1930s, China was at war with Japan, which controlled most of the coastal areas. Even so, despite threatening flights by Japanese planes over the city, Guiyang was never captured. Nevertheless, at the end of 1944, all the missionaries and children were evacuated by plane from Kunming, over the Himalayas to India. Rowland was able to stay in China to work in Chongqing with the Australian Legation in Free China and help Australians and Canadians when they were freed from internment by the Japanese.

After the War ended in August 1945, Allison was responsible for bringing their children to Australia by ship. The family was finally reunited in Adelaide for furlough before Rowland returned to China with Keith and Gwyneth so they could attend the Chefoo School, which was then located in Shanghai. I was able to stay in Melbourne with Allison till after she had given birth to Wilbur in 1947 when we too returned to Guiyang, where Rowland continued to serve as Superintendent for Guizhou. From 1948–51, all three Butler children attended the Chefoo School located at Kuling (Guling) on beautiful Mount Lushan. While there, we were able to spend two summer holidays with our visiting parents. In 1949, the Communist Revolution succeeded in overturning the government of China, which eventually resulted in the reluctant decision of the CIM to leave the country. After twenty-three years in Guizhou, Rowland had become a Director of the mission, living with Allison and Wilbur at the mission headquarters in Shanghai. The family relocated to Hong Kong until the end of 1951. Once again, Allison had to leave Rowland to bring the children by ship to Australia, while he went to Malaya to survey it as a new field for missionary work and then on to England to attend the historic Bournemouth Conference.[6]

Life had not laid an easy path for Allison to tread, but after some happy months in Adelaide with the family, the decision was made for the Overseas Missionary Fellowship to establish its headquarters in Singapore and children over ten years of age were to be kept in the homelands, living in hostels. This meant leaving Keith (18), Gwyneth (15), and me (12) behind in Melbourne, an occurrence which Allison later confessed was one of the most difficult decisions of her life. It would be four years before she saw us again.

Despite the difficult separation from her children, Allison found that Singapore suited her well, as she liked the hot weather and the new mission



Rowland Butler (front row, third from left) with other new CIMers, *China's Millions*, Australasian edition (1928): 163.

home was near the beautiful Botanic Gardens. With house help and a chauffeur available, she could attend to her missionary work. Above all, she could free her husband to continue his leadership role, which required frequent travel to the fields—often for months at a time. In Singapore, Rowland worked as Assistant Overseas Director of Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia along with Arnold Lea who was in charge of the eastern region. Arnold later wrote of Allison:

> We have always admired her clear and penetrating thinking. She came by it honestly…. What a mind she had for detail and what versatility. During her time with us she spent a year or more as post-mistress, as cashier in the Financial Department, as Recorder, as Secretary to the Medical Officer and in and through it all has had a fantastic grasp of the statistics of our Fellowship.

Life changed dramatically on 20 October 1958 while Rowland and Allison were on a short holiday in the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia. What happened is best told by Rowland, whose letter to his family was dictated to Mrs. Hogarth a week later.

> Last Monday morning we set out gaily in lovely weather for a scramble up some of the nearer tea hills overlooking Ringlet. We then decided to push on along the ridge in an attempt to discover the source of the water supply of the proposed new School. In due course we spotted the concrete tank and had almost reached it when Mother was attacked by hornets. I went back to help, and we found ourselves surrounded by these vicious creatures from which we could not speedily escape due to the rough nature of the country. Apparently, the poison from the stings had immediate effect upon us and we both flopped, having no strength to go on. We discovered that as soon as we moved a hand, several wasps would immediately attack, and so we just had to try and stay still until we mustered strength for the next move. It took us the best part of half an hour before we shook off the last of our attackers and by that time, we were both in pretty bad shape. Having been stung in the eyes it was difficult to find our way in the thick undergrowth; but eventually we were led to a track down through the thick jungle which brought us to the head of the little water system of one of the houses near the new school. Here we rested in the shade and managed to have a drink, but the water on our bitten hands hurt unbearably. The question then was to get down to the major road which was some distance off and then to find some means of travelling the one and a half miles to the Mission Home. When we reached the first house it was my idea to leave Mother there and go to the Mission House for a car. Although she was in a very bad condition, she felt it was easier to walk than to stay still, so somehow or other we made our way back home. Fortunately, Dr Maddox was here, and Mrs Harper arrived that day, so although it has been a poor holiday for them, they have been a tremendous help to Miss Dove, who has given herself to looking after us ever since. Mother has had a very bad time indeed, for the combination of shock and the poison from the stings have paralysed her from the waist downwards. I am glad to say that there are slight signs of improvement today as she can now move her legs somewhat, although she still has no feeling in her feet.

Allison continued the story in April 1959 after she was flown to Singapore, with the following extracts from her prayer letter:

> The Lord, has been so near and so precious to us all through…. A week of darkness followed, during which the outstanding memory is of joy in sins forgiven and of peace, deep peace, and the comfort of the Scriptures…. Neither the brethren that prayed for me nor I had the assurance that the Lord was about to do anything spectacular in my case, but definite program towards recovery has proceeded steadily from that day on…. Gradually as strength returned, there opened up for me a ministry of prayer AND praise and testimony, for I had many visitors… The only muscles still asleep were those I needed in walking, but I was fitted with callipers and began to learn to walk with the help of two canes…. Within a week the first invitation to speak at a girls' Bible class had come and since then more, SO the Lord has not cast me off, but has given another ministry in place of what I had been obliged to give up…. Each time I have asked the Lord for healing, he has assured me that 'His grace is sufficient.'[7]

That same afternoon Allison received her Swimming Club card which enabled her to do water therapy which was of great benefit to her. While her paralysis appeared to be caused by the hornet stings, Allison later confessed that she had felt feverish on the day of her "accident" (as she always called it) and she agreed with the later assumption by doctors that she had contracted polio at the same time.

Although Allison remained physically disabled, her missionary work in Singapore continued, as she engaged students through the Upward Path correspondence course, and also as she ministered for many years at the Sandes Home for Soldiers. Her work with Dr. Monica Hogben allowed her to combine her medical knowledge with her clerical expertise. Allison was always willing to speak at meetings and services, and her personal letter writing, counselling, and prayers were appreciated by countless people during



CIM leaders at the Bournemouth Conference in 1951, *China's Millions*, British edition (1952): 8. Rowland Butler is fifth from the right in the middle row and Arnold Lea is rightmost in the front row.



Allison and Rowland in 1971

her time in Singapore as well as during her retirement. She played another important role in her marriage—as a supportive, adaptive, and undemanding wife, despite her physical limitations.

When the Butlers finally retired in 1970, Arnold Lea concluded his farewell speech for Allison:

> I think it is this last term of service which has seen the most exciting and yet the most fruitful ministry. The Upward Path in Singapore has grown from a mere trickle to 800 registered to study the Word of God. With a large group of examiners all looking to Allison for guidance and co-ordination, by burning the midnight oil on many occasions, she has kept this ministry going. But I am sure the memory which will stand out clearest and with the deepest spiritual impact upon us has been the constant evidence of the grace of God. For twelve years now since October 1958 when on the Cameron Highlands she lost the full use of her legs, Allison has borne her physical limitations without complaint and never once let it hinder her contribution. Twice with this disability she has returned from furlough to yet another term on the field. God has blessed indeed.

Another commendation came from Allison's youngest brother Alf, who later wrote that "In all the time of her suffering I have never heard her complain, and I know that the pain must have been severe for many years."

Rowland and Allison chose to retire to the family beach house at Port Elliot, South Australia where their family could visit. However, within six months Rowland developed acute leukemia and went to his heavenly rest. In her next letter to her praying friends, Allison quoted the Apostle Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 1:3–4: "The God of all comfort, comforteth us … that we may be able to comfort (others) … by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." She went on to write of the comfort of Scriptures, the comfort of memory, the comfort of love, and the comfort of letters. God also gave Allison the comfort of a long retirement with relatively good health and opportunities of service in many ways as well as the enjoyment of her family.

Allison spent most of her remaining twenty years in Melbourne in retirement homes, eventually accepting the use of a wheelchair. She was able to see all her children married and to meet all her thirteen grandchildren, and lived not far from Keith in Melbourne. For three years she stayed in Hamilton with Gwyneth's family and spent much time counselling and praying with ladies from the churches there, where she is remembered with appreciation. She was also able to visit my husband's and my farming property, and in 1991 was there when she was taken ill and spent some months in hospital, where she witnessed to the lady in the next bed whose leg had been amputated. Her new friend Enid lived for another fifteen years, always thanking God for Allison's ministry. Writing letters, knitting socks for leprosy patients, and helping with mending meant that Allison was never idle, but her promise to God that she would spend a tithe of her time in prayer was her main priority. The Psalms were her favourite encouragement, and she quoted them on the top of nearly every letter. One that clearly characterised her life and ministry is Psalm 55:18: "He has delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, for there were many with me." **MRT**

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[1] The story of the younger Douglas Pike can be found in John David Calvert, "Douglas Pike (1908–1974): South Australian and Australian Historian," MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 2008, https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2440/51170/8/02whole.pdf. The first chapter of this thesis covers some family history.

[2] Walter and Jean (née Robinson) Pike were with the CIM in Guizhou in 1932–41 and 1949–51. They returned to Melbourne where he worked as a pharmacist. For many years, he led the Youth for China (later Youth for Asia) group. His granddaughter, Anna Griffiths, currently serves with OMF with her husband Steve.

[3] For more on this story, see J. Stark, "Our Shanghai Letter," *China's Millions*, British ed. (January 1930): 11, http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:221953; "Personalia," *China's Millions*, British ed. (March 1930): 47, James Stark, "Our Shanghai Letter," *China's Millions*, British ed. (April 1930): 57, "The Late Mr. D. F. Pike," *China's Millions*, Australasian ed. (January 1930): 3, "Notes," *China's Millions*, Australasian ed. (March 1930): 67.

[4] "Notes," *China's Millions*, Australasian ed. (March 1930): 67, "By Miss M. A. Pike," *China's Millions*, Australasian ed. (October 1930): 152.

[5] Rudolf Alfred Bosshardt was later one of two foreigners who were forced to join the Red Army's "Long March" in 1934. For his story, see R. A. Bosshardt, *The Restraining Hand: Captivity for Christ in China* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), updated as R. A. Bosshardt with Gwen and Edward England, *The Guiding Hand: Captivity and Answered Prayer in China* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), and Jean Watson, *Bosshardt: A Biography* (Oxford: Lion, 1995).

[6] The Bournemouth Conference was held by CIM leaders in November 1951 to plot the road ahead since mission work had ended in China. The group had discerned the Lord's call in February to redeploy to work "overseas" from China—thus giving the Overseas Missionary Fellowship its name. Following up on surveys taken in a number of East Asian countries, CIM leadership sent missionaries to the "new fields" of Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Taiwan. Other areas for ministry would be added in subsequent years. For more on the Bournemouth Conference, see Rose Dowsett, "Making All Things New—or Did We?" *Mission Round Table* 14, no. 1 (January–April 2019): 10–15, https://omf.org/blog/2019/04/30/making-all-things-new-or-did-we/.

[7] She never received complete healing.

"Since … she lost the full use of her legs, Allison has borne her physical limitations without complaint and never once let it hinder her contribution. Twice with this disability she has returned from furlough to yet another term on the field."
– Arnold Lea

A Personal Reflection on Experiences of Race and Racism

Nathaniel Jennings



Nathaniel Jennings was born in Bangladesh but did his higher education in the United Kingdom. He did his BA(Hons) in South Asian History at SOAS, University of London. He later got his MTh through Queens University Belfast, with his dissertation on the church in Islamic contexts. He currently resides in Belfast with his wife Donna and children Micah (12) and Tabitha (10) and serves as OMF's Area Representative for Ireland.

As I watched the footage of the murder of George Floyd on 25 May I was initially pretty numb. This was probably due to my own hard heartedness and the saturation of my mind with the constant flow, through the media, of stories and images of abuse, humiliation, and murder of men and women by other men and women around the world.

But my heart did soften and I began to process the true magnitude of the crime committed, the countless other similar crimes it brought to attention, and the deep grief and anger it stirred in millions around the world. This then led me to consider what my own part should be in making a stand against violence and hatred—whether silent or acted out—that is directed towards black lives. I am still working on that.

However, it also provoked in me a review of my own identity as someone with black heritage and to reflect upon how race and identity had impacted and affected me and my family.

My father is a white American, of English and Irish stock, with some Native American blood in the mix too. My mother's mother was white English and her father black Jamaican. Apparently, my maternal grandfather also had some South Asian roots. In addition, he had four Chinese half-sisters from his mother's second marriage.

My dad grew up in the segregated South of the USA. When he was a child, it was illegal for whites and blacks to marry. At the Christian college he went to, if a white girl wanted to date a black guy, permission from the white student's parents had to be sought.

My mum was from a working-class background in the north of England. Little academically was expected of her in school where one teacher referred to her and her classmates as "gutter rats". My mother was the first person of color to graduate from her nursing training college.

I have three younger sisters and a younger brother and we all have different shades of color and complexions, ranging from my brother who has quite dark skin and black afro hair to one of my sisters who has curly light brown hair and hazel eyes. I have a dark complexion and I am often asked if I am from North Africa or South America. I mention this because though we have the same ethnic make-up, our features and complexions have affected how we have experienced the world and been treated by people.

My mum and dad have lived in Bangladesh for most of the last forty-six years, first settling there in 1974. They have been involved in humanitarian work and seeking to show people the love, goodness, and grace of God. I



was born in Bangladesh and spent most of the first twelve years of my life there. I then returned to work there for seven years after attending secondary school and university in England. I met my Northern Irish wife, Donna, in Bangladesh, and have now lived in Belfast for the past ten years.

My first memory of becoming aware of racial differences was when riding on a rickshaw with my parents through the town of Barisal in southern Bangladesh. This was a town long associated with the exploitation and abuses that accompanied British colonial rule. Parallel to this was a long presence of Christian missionaries seeking to serve and convert the local population. Three European priests were murdered in the town, one during my childhood. Everywhere we went, we would hear cries of "red monkey, red monkey," the term many of the local children used for white folk. Throughout my childhood, I had to endure hearing such taunts from strangers aimed at my father and light-skinned sisters. I particularly hated it when men would "meow" at my sisters because of their "cat-like" light-colored eyes.

And yet the overwhelming experience of our family in relation to Bangladeshis was of welcome, affection, care, and extraordinary kindness and generosity. They seemed honored that we had chosen to live amongst them, and determined to make sure that we were respected and well treated. We lived in 100 percent Muslim villages where we felt completely safe and secure. As my parents lived humbly, respectfully, and generously amongst our hosts, they in return became extremely protective of us.

Of course, there were always exceptions. I remember after the visit of my Jamaican grandad to Bangladesh, a village girl yelled "Moni (my Bangla name) negro, Moni negro" every time she saw me. She herself had a particularly dark complexion, which in Bangladesh would have hindered her prospects with regard to marriage and all kinds of other aspirations, as tone of skin is associated with attractiveness, caste, and class.

I remember watching Nigeria play a World Cup football match with a group of men who spent much of the time laughing at the Africans'



"strange" features and physiques and how these "mountain men" had learnt to play football.

I also remember that often when I was with white kids, Bangladeshis were more interested in them than me. But generally, I was able to blend in because of my brown skin and black hair, a reality I found to be a huge blessing.

In one village my parents served in for four years, most of my friends were from the Garo tribe. The Garos numbered about sixty thousand out of the one hundred and fifty million population of Bangladesh, ninety-five percent of whom are Bengali Muslims. They are of Tibeto-Burman ethnicity, formerly animists, but now almost one hundred percent Christian, at least nominally. They have had much of their ancestral land taken by Bengali Muslims, are treated as second-class citizens, generally seen as primitive and unclean, and often referred to as "junglees" and "flat noses". However, I also remember some Garo boys boasting about how across the border in northeast India—where they were the majority—if they found Bengali Muslims, they could beat them and treat them as they wished.

Every three or four years, we would spend summers in Arkansas, in the American south, with my dad's family. I am not sure how his white family responded when he married my mum, but I do remember us all being loved and spoilt rotten by our white, southern American grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

When I was twelve, our family moved from rural Bangladesh to inner city north Manchester (Oldham) for my education. My parents chose to live in the neighborhood because it was about ninety-five percent Muslim, mainly Pakistani. Not long after moving there, my white friend and I were roughed up by a group of Pakistani boys. I am not sure if it had anything to do with our race or just some sort of "welcome to the area" ritual!

I went to a Church of England secondary school. Out of two thousand students, I think only four were non-white when I joined. I seemed to be a great novelty to the other students. In the first week, I was christened "Chief" and on the walk up to the playing fields for PE, my classmates formed a line behind me, holding javelins, and said I was taking them on a hunt. It wasn't helped by the fact that I ended up throwing my javelin an impressive distance, which confirmed to them that I had had a lot of practice throwing spears, wherever I had come from! To be honest, I found it all quite amusing and didn't mind the attention, but I do cringe now in hindsight.

I was called all sorts of names in that place: "nigger," "black bastard," "jungle bunny," and "Paki," being the most common. It was a brutal place and lots of boys and girls were called lots of names due to social background, intellect, disabilities, weight, physical features, etc. There was a guy in my class who was openly a member of the National Front who I know couldn't stand me, though he generally kept to himself. For years, every time I walked into a classroom, another boy would say, "What's that smell?" which was always followed by sniggers from others. He would often follow it up by saying, "You don't mind do you, Chief?" In response, I would keep my head down and sheepishly smile while I burnt inside with anger and shame.

I seemed to be put in a lot of bottom-set classes from which I was unable to get out, despite later going on to do well academically in higher education.

The experience at that school which sticks with me most prominently was in a German language class. The teacher, a white lady originally from Germany but long settled in England, was at her desk when one boy started to tell racist jokes to the amusement of the rest of the class. The teacher surely heard but said nothing. I was enraged by the fact that she had the

power to intervene and yet chose to let my humiliation carry on.

Years later, when I bumped into the guy who had ridiculed me, he said he was sorry if he had done anything that upset me whilst at school but didn't elaborate and I didn't pressure him to do so. I know that he had also been mercilessly physically and verbally bullied by some other boys for being overweight.

When I moved to Sixth Form College to do my "A" Levels, I was the last student to arrive in the first class and saw that all the Asians were sitting on one side of the room with the whites on the other. I was obviously expected to choose who I was with. I went and sat with the others with brown skin and that was me for the next two years—part of the ethnic minorities' group—in this racially divided class.

During my time in Manchester, I spent a lot of time with and grew very close to my Jamaican grandad. He had migrated to England as part of the Windrush generation in the late 1940s. I learnt of his painful experiences as a black man in England. He told me how he had been asked if he had a tail, how he had been refused accommodation because of his skin colour, and how one white homeowner threw a bucket of water over him when he knocked at their door to enquire about renting a room. In the early days of his life in England, he spent nights sleeping in phone boxes.

University in London was so different to school in Oldham! It was a place where my complexion and multi-cultural background was a positive thing rather than something not to draw attention to. The only thing I remember being made to feel any shame about was my Christian faith. There were only three of us in the Christian Union and being a Christian in that environment, at that time, was definitely not considered cool, and we were often mocked.

The only negative experience I recall relating to race came about because I used to walk from my student halls to university with a South Korean girl. She eventually told me that it would be better for her if we weren't seen together as often, as the other Korean students were spreading rumours that she was going out with "a black". She also said that if such stories got back to her parents, they would be dismayed.

During my uni days, traveling back and forth between the UK and Bangladesh via the Middle East as a dark-skinned young man, I got plenty of firsthand experience of how Muslims are treated with mistrust and suspicion in the West. In UK airports, I was often assumed to be a Muslim and seemed to be almost always selected for the "random" checks of my baggage and often interrogated.

After uni, I returned to the land I still so loved—Bangladesh. My brother, fourteen years younger than I, was now a teenager and I realized he had had a quite different experience of Bangladesh than I. His bigger build and afro hair drew him a lot of attention, much of which was accompanied by a mocking tone. I remember being in a car with him with the windows down and someone yelling something at him and throwing a mango seed through the window which cut his cheek.

I did have a bad experience when I was on an outing with friends and family to a national monument just outside Dhaka. It was about the time the US was bombing Afghanistan, post 9/11. A demonstration started outside with much ranting and flag burning. Some locals told us that if we were Christians, we would have our throats slit. I was wearing local dress and was able to get through the crowd and move our car to another place where the others could climb over a wall, get in, and be driven away.

Since I had learnt Bengali as a kid and with my complexion, I was able to blend into Bangladeshi life and roam around wherever I wished without unwanted attention. However, I found life much harder after marrying my Northern Irish wife. I was often asked where I had "got her". The unwanted attention and often crude remarks made about her from men were a constant source of irritation.

We were devastated to have to make the decision to leave Bangladesh and settle in Belfast for the welfare of our son who was diagnosed with autism just before his second birthday in 2010. However, we realized it would have taken an incredible amount of grace to endure the attitudes that exist towards differently-abled people there. I remember a dear Bangladeshi friend who told me a number of times that the reason my parents' landlord's son was disabled was because his father had been a corrupt police officer and this was God's judgement.

In Northern Ireland, I have been well welcomed and treated. Repeatedly being told that I speak good English and being asked where I am really from and when I converted to Christianity feels a bit patronizing, but I don't believe the sources of these utterances held any ill will towards me. One Christian leader, during a meeting to plan a multicultural event, did turn to me and say, "I am sure you must have friends who play the bongo drums. Can you get them to come along?" I found that comment slightly funny and slightly insulting at the same time!

However, I have a Sudanese friend who lives in a different part of Belfast who says he is called racist names every day. And I know in my time in the city, there have been many cases of families from ethnic minority backgrounds that have been forced to move out of certain neighborhoods because of abuse they have suffered.



Returning to the murder of George Floyd. Black people are naturally outraged by what has happened to them time and time again in America and are determined to stop it from happening anymore. With my own black heritage, I feel a part of this too, even if I don't agree with all the methods and messages embodied by some of those demanding real change. Even so, the realities faced by them come home to me.

Eight years ago, my brother moved to the States for college as he had long dreamed of. While there, he has experienced much abuse because of his skin color. A few months back, whilst taking part in a legal and peaceful protest in Los Angeles, he was shot twice with rubber bullets, and has bruises to show for it.

While I have generally avoided viewing my own journey and interactions with people through the lens of race, looking back I now see that my friends, family, and I have been affected in varying ways by our appearance and racial identity. I, along with many others, suffer because of the racist attitudes that continue to plague our societies. Particular historical and cultural moments come along when we get opportunities to speak up and challenge this, and this is such a time and such an opportunity. To stay silent would be wrong. As one who has also experienced being a victim of racism and has seen someone with privilege and the power to protect me choose to do nothing and let me suffer, my hope and prayer is that the powerful and the privileged in this present situation will have the empathy and courage to take a stand to see the righting of the wrongs that have been for so long afflicted on their black brothers and sisters.

I don't say any of this from a position of moral high ground. Looking back on my own life, there were times when I was in positions of privilege too. In Bangladesh, in particular, this came with my relative wealth and my UK and US passports. There were times when I stood up for the poor, the marginalized, and the religious and ethnic minorities against others in positions of privilege and power. However, to my shame, I could also tell stories of when I did not. This may have been due to fear, selfishness, my own apathy, or simply having myself been intoxicated by some of the prevailing prejudices and wrong attitudes of the culture I was living and breathing in. Countless times, I heard and saw the abuse of the other, the weak, and the differently able and crossed the road and carried on with my own business. Sometimes, I wish I could go back in time and be given another chance to show the courage and the decency to stand alongside people who are being oppressed.

As a Christian, this is my duty. If I understand that the implication of the Bible's narrative of God's creation of man and woman means each human is of equal and immense value in his sight; if I see how, throughout Scripture, God always longed for people of all nations to know his loving kindness; if I comprehend that Jesus inaugurated a new kingdom which would bring together, as brothers and sisters, people of every culture and ethnic background under his rule; if I realize that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out and this new kingdom was ushered in as people of many lands heard the message of the gospel, each in their own language, and it was Good News for every one of them; if I believe that the book of Revelation shows us how God wills the eternal future to be, with people of all tongues and tribes and nations, together adoring him in harmony; then I must strive to see that kingdom come here on earth, as it will be in heaven.

Jesus showed us how to play our own personal part in this unfolding story. It involves each of us being willing to cast aside our rights, power, and privilege and endure pain and humiliation in seeking the salvation of those who are oppressed, abused, and held in bondage. To see them bestowed with love, honor, liberty, and a glorious hope for the future in which they can become all they were created to be.

During this reflection, much of the focus has been on negative encounters and experiences relating to race and identity. However, my experiences of being a mixed-race person living between worlds has been overwhelmingly positive. Life has been rich and full because of it and I am truly thankful for my unique identity and life journey up to this point—an identity first and foremost as a child of God, and a journey marked by his grace and presence. A true delight in my personal story so far has been the opportunities to experience community and worship with fellow followers of Jesus from all over this world, and be part of a fellowship in which class, color, race, gender, and ability are secondary to our love for and trust in Jesus.

This remains a tangible witness to the power of the gospel of redemption and reconciliation to a world full of hatred and conflict. As Jesus said, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34–35).

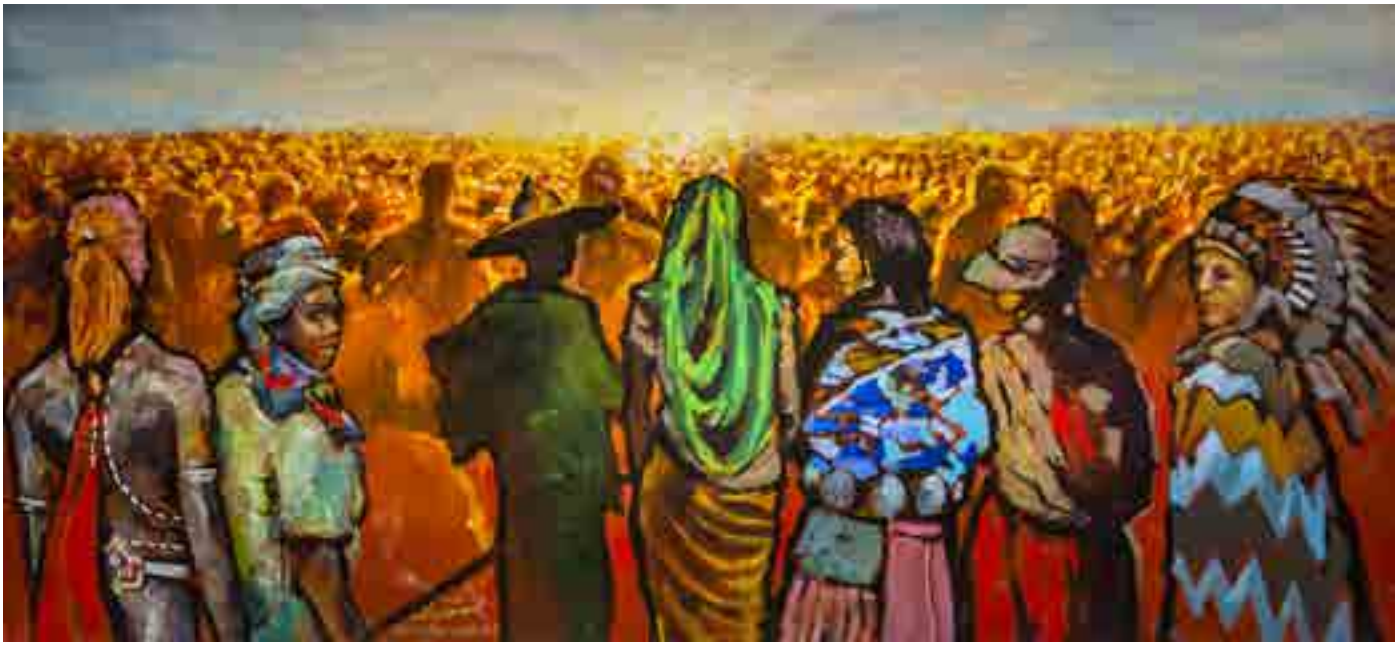
Due to history, politics, worldviews, and theology, first-century Jews and Gentiles were worlds apart and deeply antagonistic towards each other. But God, through Jesus, changed everything. As Paul wrote:

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility… His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 2:16–22)

How the world needs this today. Where there are barriers and hostilities, Lord, use us to bring reconciliation and peace.

Let us make this our prayer:

> The wondrous cross that saved my soul,
> that bore my sin and bought me whole,
> a further wonder did achieve—
> uniting all those who believe.
>
> The wondrous cross brought down
> the wall,



Throne Throng, by Hyatt Moore. Collection of The Seed Company, Arlington, Texas.

stilling the strife between us all.
Now from all flesh—Gentile and Jew—
God forms one Body from the two.

Though we are many, we are one:
each part reflecting God's great Son.
Female and male, servant and free,
bound by one Spirit's unity.

Across the earth, the Church expands.
Saints lift God's praise in distant lands,
while many weep and suffer loss,
still clinging to the wondrous cross.

Forgive us, Lord, the harm we do
when we refuse to follow You.
Forsaking love, we grasp at power.
Come, heal our sickness in this hour.

O, love amazing, love divine—
transform our hearts. (Lord, start
with mine!)
As we've received, teach us to give:
born in your love, in love to live.[1] **MRT**

[1] Gary A. Parrett, "The Wondrous Cross Brought Down the Wall" (2003).

Coming Home: Loss, Grief and Re-entry

By Judy Routamaa. Oxford, UK: Regnum, in association with Redcliffe College, 2019. ISBN 978-1912343935. 72pp.

Reviewed by Beverlea Parkhill



We have all heard the stories of re-entry of mission workers into their home cultures or experienced it ourselves. Do we feel like we are coming "home" or just returning to our passport country (or to a third country if a member of a cross-cultural marriage)? Re-entry can be a long, complex journey. Routamaa's book seeks to understand and evaluate the key issues of loss and grief in that journey and the impact these have on the mission worker's life. One of the strengths of this book is that it builds on previous research on re-entry and delivers insights into the areas of loss and grief that previously hadn't been available.

Routamaa is a member care practitioner with many years of experience working with Wycliffe/SIL in Papua New Guinea. She has personally experienced grief and loss through the process of saying goodbye to friends in PNG and returning to the UK. Routamaa acknowledges, however, that not everyone experiences re-entry in the same way. This research recognises how the degree of choice in returning home, and the circumstances and attitudes surrounding the leaving, greatly impact how returnees deal with coming home. Did they have time to plan their return? Was it their choice to return home? Did they experience a "healthy" departure? Were they returning to a familiar and supportive situation?

This book provides practical recommendations for mission agencies and their member care practitioners. It further benefits returnees themselves and their networks in order to adequately prepare, support, equip, and care for mission workers as they navigate the challenge of re-entry and the subsequent issues of loss and grief. The "professional reflection" elements throughout the book have personally helped me, in my member care role, to consider what we, as a sending centre, could and should do to support our workers through re-entry.

Coming Home is very practical and easy to read. Although its findings are based on workers from only one organisation, the experiences shared should resonate with anyone who has lived overseas and gone through re-entry.

The God of Covenant Love[1]

David Ellis



David and his wife Adèle served with OMF in Asia for about two decades before they returned to the UK in 1982. There they served in Glasgow where David was Associate Minister at St. George's Tron until 1989 when he became the national director of OMF UK. In more than fifty years of ministry they travelled and taught widely before retiring to Scotland. After caring for Adèle through her Alzheimer's, David now lives in Dundee where he serves as an elder in the Free Church.

Even when I am old and grey,
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come. – Psalm 71:18

One of the most unforgettable messages I have ever experienced came from the lips of a dying man. In his day, the godly Dr. Johnstone Jeffrey had been a Moderator of the Church of Scotland. He had been invited to the lectern at the front of the lecture hall in the old Glasgow Bible Training Institute to give a word to the students.

As he stood in front of us, he looked elderly and was clearly very frail. He opened his Bible and simply said that he wanted to read his favourite Psalm to us, Psalm 139. As he read, the sense of God's presence in the room was palpable.

> O LORD, you have searched me
> and you know me.
> You know when I sit and when I rise;
> you perceive my thoughts from afar.
> You discern my going out and
> my lying down;
> you are familiar with all my ways.
> (Ps 139:1–2)

We were conscious of hearing that other still small voice. He finished and looked exhausted. He had our sympathy. We waited for his message. We wondered if he was strong enough. His message, when it came, consisted of three halting sentences, nothing more.

"Young people often have problems with guidance for the future."

There followed a very long pause.

"God will always give you enough light to take one more step."

Another long pause.

"Take that step!"

And with that, he sat down.

The silence was eloquent. We searched our hearts; we felt we were being searched; there we found unfinished business: weaknesses in our prayer life, disobedience, areas where we knew God wanted us to "take that step."

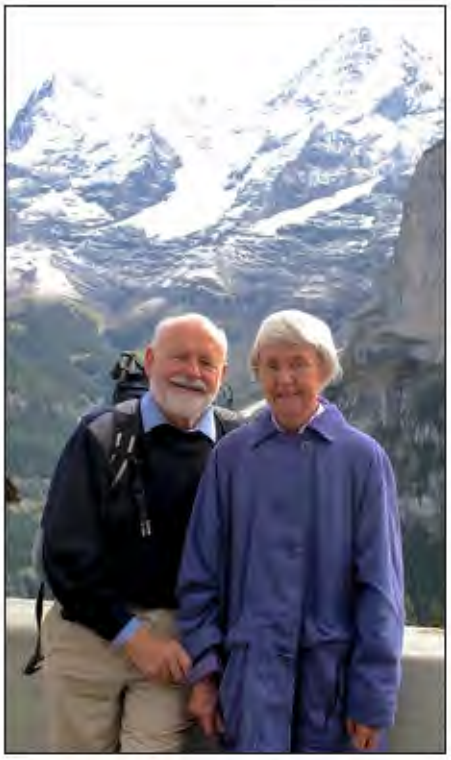
A week or so later Johnstone Jeffrey died. The message that came through his reading of that Psalm and those three sentences have lived on with me to this day.

All of that was more than fifty-eight years ago and it was what came to mind forcibly as we found ourselves facing retirement, wondering just what the next step for our ministry might be.

Retirement. Something the media likes to portray as the warm afterglow on the sunny uplands of life. An attractive dream? The end of the rainbow?

Not without some truth—but not the whole truth. The halting questions and the answering affirmations in Christina Rossetti's beautiful poetic metaphor of life as the struggle of a journey "up-hill … the whole long day," echo with those who would seek to live the life of faith.

> Does the road wind up-hill all
> the way?
> Yes, to the very end.
> Will the day's journey take the
> whole long day?
> From morn to night, my friend.
>
> But is there for the night a
> resting-place?



A roof for when the slow dark
hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it
from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers
at night?
Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call
when just in sight?
They will not keep you standing
at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore
and weak?
Of labour you shall find
the sum.
Will there be beds for me and
all who seek?
Yea, beds for all who come.[2]

It would be comfortable to think that as the pilgrim life progresses the incline might ease off some before we reach the "resting place". The language is deceptively simple yet captures the life experience of many godly men and women through the ages. It was the converted slave trader, John Newton, who wrote poignantly about his own uphill journey:

I asked the Lord that I
might grow
In faith and love and
every grace,
Might more of His
salvation know,
And seek more earnestly
His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus
to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered
prayer,
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some
favoured hour
At once He'd answer my
request
And, by His love's
constraining power,
Subdue my sins and give
me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea, more with His own hand
He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe,
Crossed all the fair designs
I schemed,
Humbled my heart and laid
me low.

"Lord, why is this," I
trembling cried;
"Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm
to death?"
"'Tis in this way," the Lord
replied,
"I answer prayer for grace
and faith."

"These inward trials I employ
From self and pride to set
thee free
And break thy schemes of
earthly joy
That thou may'st find thy all
in Me."[3]

There was a time in the life of John Henry Newman when sailing home from Italy he became very unwell. Becalmed somewhere between Palermo and Marseilles he was overwhelmed by illness and doubt. Homesick and with his mind in turmoil he penned a poem which in later days was to be made into a hymn:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the
encircling gloom
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am
far from home,
Lead thou me on.
Keep thou my feet; I do not
ask to see
The distant scene; one step
enough for me.[4]

"One step enough for me?"

Enough! Really? Facing retirement, we wondered just what that step might be for us. We had often quoted those words from Renè Padilla's experience, "God will not give you a map, but He will give you His hand," when counselling missionary candidates stepping out in faith for service in Asia. Now we were about to face a time when we were going to need to know, more than ever, just how to grasp and be grasped by that hand and walk on uphill, one step at a time!

Of course, there are times when we can, and indeed we should, do as much as we can to look to the future and plan ahead, sensibly. But then there are other times when the way ahead is not that clear and we just don't know where another step along the road will lead. Just as when climbing the Scottish mountains in a mist, you don't know what's beyond the next cairn because you just can't see through the mist. And, of course, you won't ever get to know until you reach the next cairn. But if God has given enough light for the next step, then, in faith, the challenge is to have the courage to trust Him and take it!

We had retired to a beautiful home in Perth. There was a preaching ministry round several churches in Perthshire, walking holidays in the Lake District, and wonderful trips to Switzerland with our caravan to meet up with some of Adèle's Swiss relatives along with former OMF colleagues. There were happy times with our children and grandchildren in Dundee and Glasgow. However, after a few years it was becoming more and more obvious that Adèle was having difficulties. Cooking became complicated. Writing letters, confusing. Knowing how to answer people's questions at church, intimidating. Offering hospitality and accepting invitations out from friends, daunting. Deciding what to wear, a mammoth exercise fraught with repeated attempts to get it just right. And trying to remember names and faces or just even to find words, stressful and, at times, impossible.

As for most older people, past their three score years and ten, memory problems are nothing out of the ordinary. Yet somehow Adèle's memory problems were not at all ordinary. What was the next step going to be?

Probably none of us go through life without fears of one form or another. For Adèle it was fear of the slow, cruel disease she had seen stealing away the life of her mother. She was becoming more and more afraid of suffering from the very thing she had feared the most, ever since we first met at college some fifty-seven years ago. Alzheimer's.

we both wrestled, and finally it was with real courage that she decided to share her fear with our doctor.

It is one thing to fear the beast, but another to be brave enough to be prepared both to name it and look it in the face. Yet, again, in the remarkable gentleness of our loving Shepherd, it seemed that once the psychologist and psychiatrist had confirmed a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, she was given an amazing sense of acceptance. Her condition was no longer the thing that could not be named—the elephant in the room. It had been named,



Adèle at Schynige Platte near Interlaken, Switzerland.

As retirement progressed, she became more and more dependent. It became increasingly obvious that when I was not around, she would become disorientated, anxious and distressed. So, the next step was to move to a new house—hopefully for one last time. We wanted to be nearer to our children. We left Perth for Dundee. That was the easy part. We were used to moving to a new house! What followed proved to be more delicate. When you suspect the very thing you fear the most, how can you find help to face it? And how, as one who is looking on, can you help the one you love to summon up the courage they need to face up to the very thing they fear without adding to their fears?

For some time, both of us tried to live as if nothing was out of the ordinary. But as time went on it became harder to ignore what was becoming obvious. Slowly Adèle herself became increasingly aware that things were not right. She was struggling. She wrestled,

and by the grace of God, the Great Physician gave her the strength to accept the very thing that had so long been the nightmare that haunted her. He tempered her fears with the balm of His peace. In a spirit of gentleness that was evident throughout her life she proved the truth that the Lord was with her. She had learned Paul's secret:

> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6–7).

From that day to the day the Lord finally took her to be with Him, more than six years later, the progression of the illness was slow but the outcome inevitable. Going out became more and more difficult. It was neither easy nor appropriate to go into explanations to folk outside the family circle. The loving support and understanding from within our family and closest friends were wonderful, but the reactions of some outside that circle to the very private and sensitive personal decisions we had to make was not so easy to handle. We had to learn to live with the fact that some clearly didn't, and probably wouldn't, ever be able to understand. And it was inappropriate to go into lengthy explanations; a difficult time as our circle of life, and what we had imagined was going to be our ministry, narrowed.

But it was a time when we were having to learn that, facing the prospect of what lay ahead, no matter how frightening, our loving heavenly Father would somehow use it for our good—to make us more like Jesus (Rom 8:28–29). The important thing was to allow Him to do that in us and for us and even to each other. We had to learn to handle any uncomfortable thoughts we might have about what others might be thinking about us!

Fathers often disappoint and fail in our fallen sinful world. When Jesus taught us when we pray to say; "Our Father," He wanted us to know what it means to be able to call God our Father. Human fathers fall short of the ideal, but God is not like an imperfect human father. He is the perfect pattern of what a true father should be. As Paul says, all fatherhood on earth derives its pattern from Him (Eph 3:14–15).[5] It is not the other way around.

Walking the life of faith should teach us that, as our loving father, all His ways are love even when we don't understand. Throughout our life and ministry, we had many experiences of that. We knew that God is love and all that He does He does in His love. But that does not mean we are the ones to decide to define what His love should be or how we should experience it in our lives. To do that would be to make ourselves judge and jury.

God's assurance to the prophet Isaiah is a beautiful reminder of His fatherly love for us even to grey hairs and the possible experience of failing mental powers as we grow older:

> Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of

my hands; thy walls are continually before me (Isa 49:15–16).

In the words of the hymn:

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing …

The work which His goodness began,
the arm of His strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
and never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
nor all things below or above,
Can make Him His purpose forgo,
or sever my soul from His love.

My name from the palms of His hands
eternity will not erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains,
in marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
as sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
the glorified spirits in Heaven.[6]

Questions? Of course, there were. Many! Yet all through those years came a deep conviction that the Lord knew what He could trust us with. One of the Puritan writers wrote that in the battle of life whatever arrow, from whatever source, by the time it has been allowed access to our lives, has become the Lord's will for us. We believed that to be true. "In His will, is our peace,"[7] and therefore sickness or health, poverty or riches, the very things we promised to weather when we took our marriage vows, are not works of chance but all came to us from His fatherly hand. Truths so beautifully expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism.[8]

The Psalmist in his distress said: "My soul refused to be comforted"—but then he gets a new perspective on his problems when he says, "then I thought, 'to this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the most high. I will remember the deeds of the Lord'" (Ps 77:1–2, 10–12). He looks back to God's saving acts and His faithfulness and finds comfort. He remembers God's covenant with His people; He saves; He delivers; He is faithful to His promises; He does not change when our circumstances and experiences of life change! There lies our confidence that His love will not fail us in the time of stress. His Covenant Love never changes. It does not "alter when it alteration finds."[9] So we can move forward in confidence as Newton put it:

His love in time past forbids me
to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble
to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have
in review,
Confirms His good pleasure to
help me quite through.[10]

Alzheimer's has famously been called "the long goodbye." Watching as slowly your life partner recedes from being the person you once knew to be your dearest friend, mother of your children, and life companion, is a grief I find utterly beyond the capacity of words to describe. It is a heart-rending, unresolved grief. As a psychiatrist friend, who had cared for her husband for many years in his dementia, put it: "You spoke in your letter of grieving as if bereaved and I can so understand that. In my worst moments I felt neither a wife nor a widow …" But God is close to us,[11] even in the loneliness and pain of bereavement.

Watching as slowly your life partner recedes from being the person you once knew to be your dearest friend, mother of your children, and life companion, is a grief I find utterly beyond the capacity of words to describe. It is a heart-rending, unresolved grief.

I was asked at that time as to how I felt. I only share what I wrote then if perhaps it might help anyone reading this who is facing a similar experience with his or her loved one. I wrote:

It is not easy to explain and folks looking on from the outside just would not be able to understand what it means to be living with someone who is, at this stage, defined clinically as being at the "moderate stage" of the illness. The hardest thing of all is at the deepest of levels—our relationship as man and wife and the mutual comfort of meaningful discussion and dialogue of companionship—the fundamental of any marriage.

Some illnesses, like cancer, we would all dread but even that would be something we could face together as a couple. We could talk about ways to try to fight it and still know the meaningful intimacy of debate, discussion and relationship. We could talk about it and share our fears but the progress of Adèle's Alzheimer's no longer allows for that. There is no way I can talk to her about problems—she will only register distress and fail to understand really what I am saying or get distressed. There is now no way to discuss what we can do for the best. No way to discuss what course of action we should take or what decisions we should make. That, I find, is one of the hardest things to live with. And it means, in some way I have to try and sense what is in Adèle's best interests even when I cannot hope for a rational answer from her.

The problem is that whatever our public face may seem to be—and Adèle can



almost seem normal when people greet her socially—it is just not really possible to explain the mental and emotional strain of living with what in some ways feels like a living bereavement—and even just expressing that doesn't begin to tell the half of the story.

Someone said I have to learn to manage a "balancing act" between my needs and Adèle's, but it is not a "balancing act" as such but rather a situation where the "one flesh" finds itself being irreversibly and painfully torn apart in slow motion—not something anyone who hasn't passed this way can be expected to understand. Someone, trying to be nice, said; "Oh yes, I understand, I had a relative who has Alzheimer's"—they meant well, but their experience and ours could not be more radically different. When it is your life's love and companion (your other half—your better half) who is fading away—dying by instalments—that is not the same thing as dealing with a "relative" in the family.

There are times when Adèle is not clear as to who I am—a good loveable (I trust) friend and carer for sure—and I am grateful for that. More often than not she seems to confuse me with her brother Len. That makes the experience of the illness within a marriage relationship to be of an entirely different order. The experience and my emotional reactions to it are not something I can verbalise. And how Adèle for her part feels about where she is at in terms of her own inner consciousness is not something I can know because she cannot tell me. And yet I have to try and sense where she is at. I have to monitor her emotional reactions. Her perception of reality.

And speaking of that perception of reality, there was a time when we might watch the news, a DVD, or some other programme on TV but now I realise that when the TV is on she confuses



what she sees with the realities of where she is. That narrows down what it is "safe" for her or for us to watch together. The news broadcasts which portray tense situations have her very agitated and distressed …

It was around the time that I wrote those words, that a friend of ours in North America sent us a small book by Robertson McQuilkin, who for twenty-two years had been the president at Columbia International University. His wife had the same form of dementia as Adèle and in the book he described the moment he made the decision to resign his position as President to care for her.

Some questioned the wisdom and appropriateness of resigning his position for her. Was he not leaving a strategic and important work and losing wider influence he could have had for the kingdom?

He wrote one of the most winsome and Christlike explanations of his reasoning, and most importantly of the privilege of his first and last covenant calling to his wife. It was both a comfort and a challenge to me and I realised God was giving me enough light to take the next step—Adèle's full time care. He said:

> The decision to come to Columbia was the most difficult I had to make. The decision to leave, though painful, was one of the easiest … Let me explain.
>
> My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about twelve years. So far, I have been able to carry both her ever growing needs and my leadership responsibility at Columbia. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time when she is with me, and almost none of the time when I am away from her. It is not just "discontent." She is filled with fear—even terror—that she has lost me, and always goes in search of me when I leave home. So, it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time.
>
> Perhaps it will help you understand if I share with you what I shared in Chapel at the time of the announcement of my resignation. The decision was made, in a way, forty-two years ago when I promised to care for Muriel 'in sickness and in health … till death us do part.' So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years. If I cared for her for the next forty years, I would not be out of her debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. There is more: I love Muriel. She is a delight to me—her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I don't have to care for her. I get to! It is a high honour to care for so wonderful a person.[12]

You have to wonder if Robert and Muriel, as they pledged and affirmed their love to each other in covenant before God and the congregation of His people, in the first flush of youth, full of joy, with health and strength and physical beauty, could ever have pictured having to face this moment in their lives? If they had, might they have retreated in fear from that picture of themselves in their latter days?

So, for us the "the Next Step" was clear. For me it was: "I love … Adèle … I don't have to care for her. I get to. It is a high honour to care for so wonderful a person." For Adèle it had to be to accept the very thing she had so long feared and trust that I would continue to do my utmost, humanly speaking, to love and care for her, "till death us do part."

We knew Him to be the faithful and loving Lord who had delivered us from many of our fears in many strange and exceptional dangers. Somehow, we had to see that He was still with us in this, the mundane and wearying day-to-day experience He had permitted for our pilgrimage.

In our entire ministry together, she had always been my memory for faces and names! Now remembering names was quite beyond her. A glimpse of the face of a friend we may have met on our travels many years ago would come back to her mind suddenly, and she would think that they were somewhere in the house. The result of our nomadic life and an open home, meant that at such times she experienced the powerful sense, but ill-informed, that some form of hostess duty was expected of her and she would become quite ill at ease and perplexed, not knowing how to do what she thought she ought to be doing. Adèle loved exercising the gift of hospitality. Now she could no longer open the home; our world began to shrink.

Finally, one evening while watching the news, she asked me, "Are you going to send me home?" Of course, my immediate answer was to reassure her and say, "But this is home!" But although she smiled sweetly, my answer made no sense. Inexorably the illness progressed. She began to lose all concept of where home was. Gradually she even began to wonder who I was. At times she would look at me quizzically and ask, "Do you know David Ellis?"

Early one morning the doorbell rang and our neighbour from across the road stood on the doorstep, having found Adèle shivering in her night clothes far down our street refusing to be led back to the house. With Adèle's brother and his wife from Canada staying overnight with us we had forgotten to lock the front door. Adèle, who would frequently get up in the night and walk about, had managed to get out of the house and wander down the road. I ran outside and down to the next bend in the road to find her holding hands with our neighbour's wife, then she came back home with me. This was not the first time this had happened.

I select these few vignettes from so many similar stories through the years, leaving out others which it would be too painful to relate; quoted, not because they were dramatic and exceptional but because they typified the routine of our lives through those days. Domestic scenes made poignant by their very ordinariness and our seeking to understand God's hand on both our lives. We knew Him to be the faithful and loving Lord who had delivered us from many of our fears in many strange and exceptional dangers. Somehow, we had to see that He was still with us in this, the mundane and wearying day-to-day experience He had permitted for our pilgrimage. He is the God of the big picture, raising up and bringing down nations and kingdoms, but now we had to discover that He is not silent or far away when we need Him more than ever. We were grappling with the intimate needs of our frail and failing bodies and minds, but He was true to His promise: "I will never leave you or forsake you!" Or as the Classic Amplified Bible (AMPC) highlights the impact and emphasis of the text in the original:

> … for He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!] (Heb 13:5)[13]

Did the Lord have to take us through this path in our marriage that we might come to understand, at a much deeper level, the nature and meaning of His Covenant Love for us? Christ, as our great bridegroom saw and knew from before the world was made, exactly what it was going to cost Him to establish that covenant relationship with us as His bride. It would cost Him His life. All that was something we thought we knew—but to what extent was it embedded in our hearts?

Towards the end, when her illness was getting to be more than we could handle as a family, we had to face up to the reality that she needed professional care. And so, with the advice and help of the family, and in the goodness of God we found a place nearby in the community. The staff there made it a loving home. Being the gentle, gracious, and godly person she had always been, they did not find it hard to love her. I was able to visit her most days for the final two years of her life and whenever we would sit together on a sofa, read the scriptures and pray she was calm and at peace. Often, I suspect, she mightn't have been exactly sure as to who I was. But there were just one or two occasions when I would arrive and see her face light up with a beautiful smile of recognition. The sense of joy of being able to lock eyes with the dearest face in all the world on such days was an unforgettable experience. A memory that even now moistens my eyes.

But we must see through our tears and look into the face of Christ. And it is, as His face comes into focus, that we discover, in greater depth, the health-giving fear of the Lord. He is the bridegroom who has made, and will keep, His covenant promises to us as His bride no matter what changes in us. He doesn't love us because He saw us as warriors who would hold the course. He did not choose us because we might become characters you write legends about (Eph 1:4). None of us dare claim to be heroes that merit His love. Our doubts and fears and failing powers may surprise us. They do not surprise Him or weaken one billionth part of a percent His willingness to love us to the end and help us along the road as it winds uphill "the whole long day." His covenant of love stands on an unshakeable foundation—He gave Himself for us. He loves us and redeemed us with His own life's blood. Throughout Scripture God describes His relationship with His people in terms of a marriage relationship. Marriage is defined as being between a man and a woman; an analogy of the covenant relationship we have with our heavenly bridegroom, Christ. That

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Newly engaged David and Adèle during their brief meet up in April 1963 in Singapore where she was attending orientation training.

is why it is so very special, a covenant promise establishing our identities within the relationship we have to one another as husband and wife, never to be entered into without serious commitment. Doubts, fears, frailty, illness, pain, and weakness do not change that relationship. That is the crowning glory of marriage, as God designed it, that it survives and holds firm no matter what winds He may allow to blow upon it! God gave marriage to us to be a picture of His forever-husband love to us!

> Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her … the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. (Eph 5:25, 31–32)

Despite the adjustments we had to face in the last years of our marriage, one thing never changed—our relationship. Adèle was my wife; I was her husband! Before God, and before the law of the land, we had entered into the covenant of marriage and made our vows to one another. It was that mutual promise that underwrote the bond between us. Before God we were man and wife. One flesh. Our identities did not alter on account of her illness.

And, whether or not she was able to understand it, as her mind began to shut down, it was that covenant love into which we entered before God and our Indonesian brothers and sisters in the Javanese Church at Salatiga, more than fifty years ago, which was the assurance that I would always love, care, and provide for her for as long as I was able to look after her.

As believers we are "in Christ". And Christ lives in us by His Spirit. It is through His indwelling presence we are empowered to live, for He "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph 3:20). No matter what we experience, how we feel, or whatever happens to us in this world, that is what defines our relationship to God. Being "in Christ" has become our identity.

Adèle committed herself to Christ in her teenage years. She had been born again and knew the truth that "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Cor 5:17). She, by the grace of God, was a new creation living in a new relationship to God. The identity that defined her was that she was "in Christ", the identity that was described by the Apostle Paul when he said: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

She walked with God and knew the secret that so many of the Lord's people have discovered: "the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27). People today have become obsessed with the question of identity and, of course, as you watch the sad progression of someone with Alzheimer's, the question of identity inevitably rises in your mind. But for Adèle we knew the wonderful truth that, being "in Christ", that identity of hers would never change.

That's who she was. That's who she still is. Despite her frailty, that identity was never lost—it remained unaffected by what she was able to feel or understand. Nothing could alter it. And it was with that very identity she was welcomed with open arms into the "resting place". Towards the end of her road, when all her human resources were depleted and her mind had all but closed down, what she could not now understand any more didn't matter. Her Lord's resources were more than enough for her. She was His.

Christ never promised immunity from suffering and times of anxiety. None of us go through life without fears, a fear that our faith might fail in the last years under severe testing, a fear of persecution, a fear of being challenged to deny our faith, a fear of suffering, a fear of ill health, a fear of pain, a fear of poverty, a fear of bereavement, a fear of loneliness—the list could go on and on and on. But if our trust is in Christ then, being "in Christ", we are secure in the promise of His unchanging covenant love. "I will never leave you or forsake you!" The One, who sees us as His bride and reveals Himself to us as our husband, will never abandon us. Never—not ever!

It is three years ago since Adèle passed away. We were happily married for fifty-two years. For all of us life has its good days and bad days, its massive reversals, its domestic day-to-day traumas, and everything in between. But for believers, none of that changes who we are in our relationship and identity as those who are "in Christ". It isn't dependent on how we feel nor is it destroyed by anything that life might throw at us. It is an identity and relationship based on His covenant love—His marriage commitment to us. And that is the guarantee we have, as followers of Christ, that He will keep us safe and secure as His own to the very end of the way.

> Yes, I to the end shall endure,
> As sure as the earnest is given;
> More happy, but not more secure,
> The glorified spirits in Heaven.[14]

As the Good Shepherd says of His lambs: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

What an extraordinary gospel! Christ left heaven to make me His bride.

Beautiful in His eyes! I am loved, not because of anything in me but because of the beauty of who He is—for God is love. If being "in Christ" defines my identity, then nothing can make me unattractive in His eyes. Nothing can separate me from His love.

> If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? … For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:31–39).

Incredible? Yes! But glorious, gospel truth!

And that is what it means to *fear* God. That is the fear that can drive out every other fear. And if that sounds a lot like *love* God, that's because in the end they come to the same thing.

Of that love Paul says: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor 13:12). Throughout her life, Adèle knew that love "in part". Now she knows it fully, even as she is "fully known".

Let us bow before Him. May He, in His grace, help us come to know the wonder of His covenant love in greater depth so that the very peace of God, that passes understanding, might keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6–7).

> Through all the changing scenes of life,
> In trouble and in joy,
> The praises of my God shall still
> My heart and tongue employ.
>
> O make but trial of His love;
> Experience will decide
> How blest are they, and only they,
> Who in His truth confide.
>
> Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
> Have nothing else to fear;
> Make you His service your delight.
> Your wants shall be His care.[15]

God will always give you enough light to take one more step—take that step!
MRT

[1] This article is from David Ellis' book *Through All the Changing Scenes: A Lifelong Experience of God's Unfailing Care* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2020).
[2] Christina Rossetti, "Up-Hill."
[3] John Newton, "I asked the Lord that I might Grow," *Olney Hymns*, 1779.
[4] John Henry Newman, "The Pillar of the Cloud."
[5] "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." The Greek for family (*patria*) is derived from the Greek for father (*pater*).
[6] Augustus Montague Toplady, "A Debtor to Mercy Alone."
[7] Dante, *The Divine Comedy*.
[8] G. I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1993), 48.
> Q 27 What do you mean by the providence of God?
> A: The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, … food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things come, not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.
> Q 28 What does it profit us to know that God has created, and by his providence still upholds all things?
> A: That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future may have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love, since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.

[9] William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116 "Let me not to the marriage of true minds …"
[10] John Newton, "Begone unbelief," 1779.
[11] As Acts 17:27–28 says, "he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'"
[12] Robertson McQuilkin, *A Promise Kept* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1998), 21–23.
[13] *Amplified Bible Classic Edition*. Cf. Deuteronomy 31:6.
[14] Augustus Montague Toplady, "A Debtor to Mercy Alone."
[15] Nicholas Brady and Nahum Tate, "Through All the Changing Scenes of Life."

Continued from review of *Asian Christian Theology*, p. 25

Malaysian, one is Korean, one is Middle Eastern, one is Sri Lankan, and one is from Hong Kong. Most are men; there were only two female contributors. While a few of the essays are written in highly academic language, most of them are much easier to read.

Many positive things can be said about this book. I appreciate the way the contributors explain biblical truth in non-Western ways. Their explanations of theology from different cultural perspective allow us to view the multi-faceted wonder of the gospel from unique perspectives. Many examples of this can be found throughout the essays. For instance, Ivor Poobalan notes that "Asian Christians … search for presentations of Jesus that resonate with Asian categories of thought and address the most immediate challenges to witness and mission" (95). He then details and evaluates several explanations.

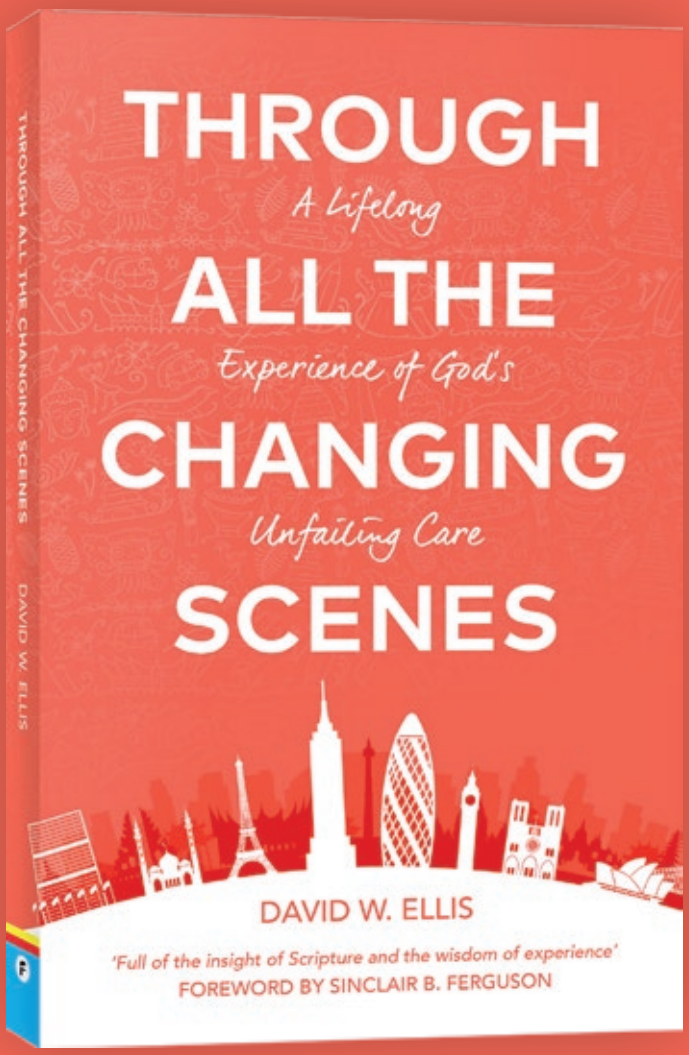
A second contribution is the vivid portrayal of the authentic struggles that Christians living in Asia experience to live out their Christian faith. In light of this heavy truth, Kar Yong Lim insists that a robust theology of suffering needs to be developed for the Asian church.

A third contribution is the deep thinking given about how to witness to people committed to other Asian religions. One example of this is Lalsangkima Pachuau's guidelines to cooperate, encounter, and communicate with those of other religious traditions.

I have two criticisms of this book. The first is that, due to the vastness of Asia and the limited size of the book, many Asian contexts are not represented. There are no contributors from Central Asia, Russia, Mongolia, Indonesia, Taiwan, or Japan. Some of these places are briefly mentioned in the essays, but the contributors are not cultural insiders from these areas of the Asian geographical landscape.

My second criticism comes in the form of a question. As all but one of the contributors received theological degrees (some more than one) from academic institutions in the West, to what extent can it truly be said that the contributors' thinking about the intersection of culture and the gospel is indigenously Asian?

Overall, this is a very well-composed collection of essays by Asian cultural insiders who help an English-reading audience (especially Western cross-cultural workers like myself!) better understand the cultural and religious challenges of ministering the never-changing gospel of Jesus Christ in all of its fullness to people who live in a rapidly changing Asian environment. While some essays will be more useful for certain ministry contexts than others, I strongly recommend this book for anyone who desires to be a reflective practitioner of Christian mission in Asia.



… heart–warming and deeply moving …
Patrick Fung, *Director, OMF International*

… challenges us as readers to a faith that is daring and uncommon today.
Os Guinness, *Author and Conference Speaker*

… a testimony to the grace and utter trustworthiness of God ….
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