Introduction: ‘Come on in! the making of many homes’

Darrell Jackson

For many Australians, the popular notion of ‘home’ is on view in the iconic Australian movie, *The Castle* (1997). Its memorable one-liners are often quoted with a smile, even though we know they are poking fun at our addiction to bricks and mortar. Darryl Kerrigan’s famous, ‘It’s the serenity of the place’, does nothing to undermine the association of ‘home’ with ‘house’. As the authors of *Reimaging Home* demonstrate, this is a one-sided and inadequate association.

To reimagine home, the task they set themselves, here, is to throw open the metaphorical windows, doors, and skylights and allow in the fresh breeze of new ideas, voices, and participants in the making of many homes. The authors in this modest volume, invite you, the reader, to ‘come on in!’ and to join them in reimagining home as we each respond to God’s mission to, among, and with us.

A concern for God’s mission remains central to the Australian Association for Mission Studies and its support of the scholarly study of God’s mission is the rationale for its existence. However, the triennial conferences of the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS) have no fixed abode. Institutional partners in Melbourne, Canberra, Adelaïde, and Sydney, have each hosted an AAMS Conference over the last ten years and AAMS, established in 2006, has operated from administrative bases in Melbourne and Sydney for the last twelve years. These facts point to the sense that our Association must look to others in its making of a ‘home’, given our own limited facility and resources.

What for AAMS is of relatively minor consequence, is for the many individuals and families who have been uprooted and struggle to establish home in a new land, of much greater consequence. AAMS has found its ‘place’ over the last twelve years within the family of similar associations known as the International Association for Mission Studies and gratitude and hopefulness characterise this current adolescent phase of its life. Such attitudes are also common among the many individuals and families who are given new opportunities to reimagine home in a new place.

However, AAMS has also faced periods when the future has been less than certain. The loss of key members of the family, financial vulnerability, the impermanence of membership; each of these has generated periods of anxiety, frustration, and fearfulness. Reimagining home, for those who must do so, can be accompanied by its own sense of anxiety, frustration, and fearfulness. This collection of chapters remains sensitively pastoral and radically oriented to the narratives shared here, of people who have had to re-imagine home in a wide, sometimes bewildering, range of new situations and circumstances.

**Reimagining Home: understanding, reconciling, and engaging with God’s stories together**

Our fourth AAMS triennial conference in 2017 was hosted and co-organised with Whitley College, Melbourne. Whitley has a keen and ongoing commitment to contextual mission training and has been a strong supporter of AAMS since hosting the 2005 Australian Missiology Conference that led to the formation of AAMS one year later. Whitley was a key institutional partner in helping to establish AAMS in the early years, providing an institutional base for the first secretary of AAMS, Rev Professor Ross Langmead.

The initial planning for the conference began in 2014 and collaboration continued throughout 2015 and 2016. The conference theme was proposed by the AAMS Committee at the July meeting in 2016, and Whitley partners endorsed this at a joint meeting in August 2016. At the conference, held from the 2nd to the 5th July 2017, 107 scholars and students of mission gathered to present and listen to papers addressing the conference theme in one of seven thematic streams. This current volume is one of the fruits of the conference, with selected chapters edited and selected according to four thematically arranged sections.

**Introducing our nineteen contributors**
The first four contributors alert the reader to the dangers of equating ‘home’ with little more than bricks and mortar. In section one, chapters are arranged to illustrate an investigation of the themes of ‘Incarnation and fragility: negotiating home in the face of overwhelming odds’. This section takes something of a lead from the biblical witness to Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of Man who embraced the created order as an embodied human being, yet who had no permanent place in which ‘to lay down his head’ and call home.

In her opening chapter, one of the conference’s plenary speakers, Sefarosa Carroll, carefully scrutinises the concept of ‘home’. Her rich and colourful portrait points to the problematics involved in talking of Australia as home, the need for a more ethnically diverse understanding of home, and points to the subversive notion of understanding journeying as ‘home’. She develops a careful argument for understanding homemaking as the activity that works towards establishing places of permanence, hospitality, affiliation and belonging, among others. In sum, she envisages a place that encourages the flourishing of all human and non-human life, a place which we can imagine the Lord of all creation being pleased to call home.

In their respective chapters, Mick Pope and Deborah Guess, orient their discussion of home towards an understanding of planet earth as a home for humanity. For Guess, an ecological focus points decisively away from purely individualistic understandings of home. Earth as ‘home’ is the most widely shared home that any of us will ever inhabit. She points to the problematic of a Christian tradition that places the sole emphasis upon sojourn and homelessness as a virtue of discipleship that is oriented towards the future reign of God. Guess challenges us to read the incarnation of Jesus as God’s divine ‘yes!’ to the planetary ‘home-place’ that we call ‘the earth’.

In contrast, Pope’s chapter may appear somewhat ironic. He suggests that collective human activity has the very real potential to render humanity homeless, through making uninhabitable an increasingly fragile earth. Pope is a meteorologist and his attention to the detail of the pacific region adds authenticity to his discussion of human impact upon climate change in a ‘disrupted world’. Pope suggests that a new concept of eco-mission is required to persuade humanity to discover new ways of making home in a disrupted world. His development of the theme of a homeless people living with the eschatological hope of home is a compelling call to eco-mission.

In his contribution to this section, Jonathan Cornford outlines an embodied economic witness that takes home seriously as an important context for the shaping and sustaining of this kind of alternative economic understanding. He issues a call for a biblically-informed ‘true materiality’ that subverts a ‘consumer materiality’ informed only by capitalism. Cornford points to incarnation and creation as central theological resources for developing this new, whole of life, economic vision.

In the second section, ‘Migrant narratives of home’, six contributors deal with highly topical themes that illustrate the ways that Australia is becoming home to various groups of people, both inside and outside of the church.

Mark and Monica Short explore this theme through the lens of Anglican rural parishes that must minister to the medium to long-term rural populations of Australia alongside the recent arrivals of refugees located to the country within the scope of the UN’s humanitarian resettlement programme. They set this within a discussion of the tendency of globalisation to create shared spaces, or virtual homes. The Shorts suggest that this is often far from being a real home of welcome, connection, participation, and belonging. To achieve this, they point to an understanding of Christian mission that works towards a new, real, and reimagined home.

Michael Chu is a first-generation Chinese migrant pastor, living in Sydney for over thirty years. Chu tells a little-known story of Chinese churches in Sydney, pointing back to a continuous presence for almost 130 years. He sets his discussion against the wider background of Chinese migration and presence in Sydney over the same period. The final challenges he leaves for his own church community is whether their churches are still seen as a ‘home’ for Australian-born or Australian-raised second and third generation Chinese young people.

Sharmila Blair makes important connections between her own experience and the biblical narratives of Ruth, the fifth chapter of Mark’s gospel, and the story of the Samaritan woman in John chapter
four. She reads these texts from the perspective of the ‘other’ and offers her readings as way to facilitate those ‘outside’ being invited to belong ‘inside’ the family of God.

Graham Scott writes, as does Michael Chu, about aspects of church as experienced by second-generation Chinese Australians. He understands ‘home’ as a helpful metaphor to describe a group of Australian-born and Australian-raised Chinese youth becoming a community and a church. This is a vital step, because according to Scott, church is the collective experience by which the Chinese young people interpret their own experiences of life in their Australian home.

Stephen Said writes out of the orienting theological insight that he is living between two worlds and yet fully at home in neither. Set against what he describes as a ‘joyless’ childhood, Said imagines a way for the church to engage more profitably with second and third generation migrants.

The final contribution to this section is the work of a missiologist, Edward James, who explores the missiological consequences of the increasingly ethnically diverse cities of Australia. He suggests that whereas formerly, missionaries left the shores of Australia in search of people who had yet to hear the Gospel, now there are countless opportunities to encounter such people in our cities. This requires a reconceptualization of the task of mission, trying to understand it with reference to a reimagining of home for people considered ‘least reached’.

In the third section, ‘Imagination and re-imagining – finding home in the biblical texts’, attention is switched to biblical narratives that are offered by the six contributors as a key theological resource for the task of re-imagining home in a world in which there exist multiple options that might be considered ‘home’.

Deborah Storie reads Luke 19:1-27 (the story of Zacchaeus) using a form of intercultural exegesis which enables her to re-imagine the Jericho parables, identifying the power structures laid bare in the text, and which she argues are intended to exclude and alienate. By doing so, Storie offers resources for a more adequate Christian response to the crises prompted by immigration and other social phenomenon.

Steve Taylor sets out to introduce the reader to the Maori leader and ‘kingmaker’, Wiremu Tamihana, who developed a way of reading key biblical texts (particularly the epistle to the Ephesians) that allowed him to re-position his own Maori people as the true and rightful inheritors of traditional Maori lands, as partners with equal rights to making home as their British co-signatories to the Waitangi Treaty of 1840. In sum, drawing on this historical account, Taylor offers the notion of a biblically-informed practice of ‘home-making’ as a public missiology.

In his chapter, Siu Fung Wu outlines a typically careful reading of Romans with reference to multicultural contexts of first century Rome and twenty-first century Melbourne. He does so by evoking the Pauline metaphors of familial relationship, drawing the significance of sibling love as a basis for social cohesion as well as for Christian community.

Xialoi Yang reads the gospel of Luke to developing a characteristically Chinese way of understanding home with reference to a steam-boat, or ‘hot pot’ theology. With reference to Chinese table meals, Yang draws our attention to the instances in Luke’s gospel of Jesus eating with friends, neighbours, and other contemporaries. Her reading is subversive of some elements of Chinese cultural table practice, but she is no less critical of western assumptions. However, her primary concern is to illuminate community, hospitality, and the ministry of Jesus within the setting of the kingdom of God and to do with a concern to better inform our practice of inclusion and welcome.

Eleonora Scott turns the focus onto the Old Testament texts of Isaiah. She introduces the Hebrew concepts of house, home, and temple, as ways of talking about the home of the Lord in Isaiah which allow her to make application to contemporary church and mission practices. Central to her reading of the Lord’s home is its function as a place of instruction, refuge, justice, and holiness. When this home is no longer identified with a particular people, God looks for other peoples, committed to faithful and holy observance of God’s will and purposes, and among whom He can presence himself to make a home.
Keith Dyer delivered the plenary Bible studies at the conference and here he offers a reading of home as ‘polis’ and ‘topos’ from Mark’s gospel. Dyer ponders the absence of direct gospel references to the places (or topoi) of either Sepphoris or Tiberias, Hippos, and Scytholopis, cities of note at the time of Jesus. He suggests that the absence of references to these places represents a rejection of the material culture of Herod and the Caesars. In rejecting kingdom and Empire, Jesus offered instead the banquet of the wealthy and powerful to 5,000 people seated in the fields overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Home for Jesus is to be found precisely in such places, not in the comfortable palaces and villas of either kingdom or Empire.

In section four, ‘Home and the missionary experience’, three authors point to the experience of finding and making home in the context of missionary service. Much of what they write is core to the identity of many AAMS members. This basic experience of making home in another culture explains, in part, the personal and existential commitment to the theme of the book demonstrated in these final three chapters of the book.

In chapter seventeen, Rosalind Gooden introduces the pioneering Australian women who entered missionary service in Bengal during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Having left homes, they had to make new homes in a culture that had no concept of the single career female. Among married missionary colleagues, they struggled for acceptance and had to negotiate for separate living quarters, having been initially billeted with married missionary couples. Despite such challenges, Gooden observes that many of these single women became highly regarded, finding a sense of home as ‘mothers in the Lord’.

Linda Deveraux was raised in a missionary family based in the Democratic republic of Congo during the violent periods of political instability in the 1950s and 60s. Her experiences set the backdrop for a more formal study of the various traumas experienced by missionary families, an under-examined area of formal research. Deveraux discusses the main reasons for missionary trauma, introduces the problematic aspects of categorising the children of missionaries using categories that ‘other’ the so-called ‘third-culture kids’, and calls for a more adequate response to those who have returned to the countries from which they were sent, traumatised, and who may no longer be able to name their country of birth, ‘home’.

In the final chapter of this book, plenary conference speaker, J. Dudley Woodberry, draws on his significant understanding and experience of mission among Muslims. He highlights the points of correspondence between Christianity and Islam and suggests ways in which Christians might adapt new customs and practices that foster acceptance by Muslims in a ‘shared home’. Woodberry points beyond this initial welcome and social encounter to multiple instances of Muslims seeking a spiritual home beyond the militant religiosity of some forms of Islam.

‘Come on in!’: hosts and guests

Throughout this book, an ongoing conversation is underway. In it, our various contributors engage in an exploration of who gets to define ‘home’, the host or the guest? They make frequent reference to the various ways in which home is described, and experienced; whether relationally, dynamically, or with reference to our global home. The discussion they encourage and energise takes equally seriously the competing claims of home owner and home dweller. As theologians, they consider carefully what it means for humans to be ‘at home’ and discuss with equal care, the implications of understanding the Incarnation as the divine experience of ‘coming home’.

Each, in their own way, is a testimony to the reality of a God in whose mission we are called to participate. In doing so, the contributors to this volume remind us that in taking flesh, the incarnate Word of God, Jesus of Nazareth, came to dwell among those who were his own kith and kin, but that his own ultimately rejected him. This book contains a call to persevere in this mission. This is deeply paradoxical, for mission is a call to homelessness in a world in which the Spirit of God continues to make resident the divine presence in every human culture that opens its homes and hearts to welcome the coming King of Kings.