

INTRODUCTION

To live in interesting times, to be influenced by great figures, and to be shaped by their scholarship is a rich experience that enables one to become in their own time a formative figure for future generations. Larry Nemer is such a figure and this text, *Creating a Welcoming Space: Reflections on Church and Mission*, is a tribute to his diverse and consistent efforts to combine scholarship, teaching and pastoral ministry.

Educated in the Divine Word seminary in Techy, Illinois, at De Paul in Chicago, the Gregorian University in Rome, Catholic University in Washington and Cambridge University through the decades of the 1950's into the 1970's in a variety of disciplines ranging from seminary studies in philosophy and theology, American literature, missiology and church history, Larry had the good fortune to be engaged and influenced by some of the best thinkers of the era. In his subsequent teaching in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom he was to influence many so that one of his former students claimed him as 'the father of modern missiology'. Over more than fifty years of teaching students from different cultures in different continents he is indebted to many as are many to him.

Larry has eloquently told his own story of his 'pilgrimage in mission',¹ so I want to draw attention to just one of those who shaped his life and work and that was R. Pierce Beaver, Professor at the University of Chicago from 1955-1972 who was the outstanding American missiologist of his era. An invitation to engage seminarians on the theme of interreligious dialogue led to eight years of friendship and mentoring that introduced the young Larry to ecumenical fellowship and scholarship in missions. When Pierce Beaver retired from the University of Chicago, Larry took him out to lunch to thank him for the years of accompaniment. During the meal Larry said that when he first met Pierce he felt torn between teaching, research and pastoral work believing that he had to choose one direction. However, he said that it was through his experience of Pierce that he had learned that it was possible to combine all three.

Those of us who have walked some of the journey with Larry have stories to tell of aspects of his ability to teach, to research and publish and to engage people pastorally, but one of the truly enduring memories is of how he can create a welcoming space for people and for ideas. It is that hospitality that we wish to celebrate in this *Festschrift*.

There are thirteen essays which address a range of issues, but we have grouped them into three different sections. First there are essays which deal with aspects of mission from a variety of foundational perspectives. Second there are three papers which are concerned with questions of history which is a significant dimension of Larry's scholarship. The Third section looks at mission in a changing world.

In part one, *foundational perspectives*, we engage some of Larry's former colleagues at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. We begin with a paper by Robert Schreiter that examines the theological resources the Church brings to bear on its engagement with a globalised world. He explores the notion of 'catholicity' historically before looking at two contemporary discourses of catholicity which contribute to shaping mission today. The first discourse focuses on the extension of the church and emphasises solidarity, dialogue and inculturation. The second dwells with the gift of fullness of faith and emphasises

¹ Larry Nemer, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33.1 (January, 2009): 39-41. Reprinted in Larry Nemer, *The Great Age of Mission: Some Historical Studies in Mission History* Studia Instituti Missiologici SVD (Sankt Augustin: Styler Verlag, 2013).

contemplation of beauty, dwelling in the truth, and rich liturgical celebration emphasising transcendence. These two approaches lead to questions about identity, suffering and justice about which Schreiter urges us to reflect on how we attend to these different discourses, how we listen, how we locate ourselves, how we communicate for these issues shape mission.

Chapter two is by Stephen Bevans and is concerned with where, how, and what we do in mission today in secularised cultures. Context is a foundational issue in any consideration of mission and is an essential consideration if we are to speak of ‘new evangelisation’ in any realistic way. The essential component of mission in these contexts is dialogue or openness of heart so that we are evangelised by those whom we seek to evangelise. It is in this mode of openness that we can engage prophetically and bring a message of hope. He then reflects on three of the six constitutive elements of mission proposed in his major work with Roger Schroeder:² witness and effective proclamation, liturgy as mission and justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

In chapter three, Dianne Bergant draws our attention to *missio Dei* reminding us that the mission of the church is located in the context of the activity of God rather than the action of God being located within the context of church. She then invites us to reflect on three sets of biblical texts that focus on mission and witness “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Important though the biblical mandate is she acknowledges that while the past can inspire us we cannot simply replicate *missio Dei* in the contemporary context. Turning to *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, she examines the document’s articulation of the changed relationship between the church and the contemporary world and reminds us how we are all called and sent on mission.

The final chapter of *foundational perspectives*, authored by William R Burrows, invites us to consider how becoming an icon of God is the spiritual foundation of mission. In an examination of famous words of Irenaeus, “for the glory of God is a living human being, and the life of a human being consists in beholding God,”³ Burrows emphasises the importance of *theosis* – becoming God-like as the foundation of mission. In so doing he challenges the goal oriented approach to mission that is so characteristic of the lives of many earnest and hard-working people and invites them to enter more deeply the world of contemplation of the Triune one whom they proclaim. He further explores what he calls ‘moral therapeutic deism’ as the dominant western approach to religious and spiritual life before returning to his emphasis on becoming an icon of God.

In the second part of the book we turn more to the second disciplinary stream that has featured in the life of Larry Nemer – namely, church history. Here under the heading, *honouring the historical*, we have three very different chapters that take us from the beginning of Christian tradition to the individual achievement of a Pacific island missionary and conclude with a chapter on the search for the Cardinal Manning papers which were unavailable to Larry during his doctoral work on nineteenth century Anglican and Roman Catholic approaches to mission.

The fifth chapter is by Roger Schroeder and draws on both of Larry’s disciplinary specialisations in missiology and church history. The focus is about the beginnings of Christian tradition from a global perspective and seeks to listen to and represent different voices from a variety of historical contexts. From these contexts emerge the ‘threads’ of

² Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

³ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heretics* IV, 20, 7.

Christian Tradition in Scripture; liturgy, sacraments and art; ministry and organisation; spiritual, religious and social movements; theological developments; mission, culture and religions. The chapter is part of a larger and more ambitious project but it draws us back to the time of emergent Christianity in a variety of locations reminding us that no one tradition has a monopoly on the interpretation of our story and that there are a variety of voices shaped in different contexts. The rich portrait that emerges is one that focuses on local churches following Jesus Christ while adapting to their particular context.

Ian Breward offers us a story that brings to light some interesting personalities and practices that might otherwise have been entombed in the dusty tomes of bound missionary journals. The focus is the small Pacific island of Rotuma, six hundred and forty two kilometres north of Fiji and the story is first about missionary endeavours on the island and then turns to Fuata Taito who became a missionary in Australia and worked among the Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land and Goulburn Island. The effectiveness of this Pacific Islander missionary is remarkable in the context of a country that, at the time, struggled with mission to the native peoples of the land.

In chapter seven, Peter Price takes us on a detective journey to discover the missing Cardinal Manning papers (Cardinal Manning, 1808-1892, was an Oxford convert to Catholicism). The essay traces sources that should have been available to Larry in his own doctoral research on the missionary endeavours of nineteenth-century Catholic and Anglican churches, but were lost seemingly to posterity. In his own doctoral research, Peter Price as a scholarly sleuth finds the missing papers, and this chapter recounts his adventure.

The final section of the *Festschrift* gathers a range of essays under the rubric of *mission in a changing world*.

Writing from Japan, Michael Seigel addresses a crucial issue regarding the relationship of Catholic theology and other religious traditions. Living in a complex society where Christianity is a minority religion with a history of persecution Seigel offers us an overview of theological thought in the Catholic tradition from a context where religious dialogue is an essential dimension of life. Drawing on Karl Rahner's writing about 'anonymous Christians' as setting a direction for Catholic thinking about other religious traditions, he sees present thinking as proposing that God wills all to be saved and people can gain saving grace from the religious traditions to which they belong. However, this grace is always the grace of Christ and for this reason the continued proclamation of the gospel remains essential. This new openness of Catholicism to other religions raises yet more questions and in the remainder of the articles Seigel explores the supposed 'limitedness of other religious traditions', the 'human limitedness in Christianity', and the 'implications for the role of other religious traditions'. He then reflects on how this more inclusive way of thinking leads us to address our understanding of 'salvation' and 'conversion'.

In chapter nine, Robert Kisala invites us to explore the mystery of the Trinity as the theological foundation for interculturality. Drawing on the spiritual legacy of Arnold Janssen and the contemporary writing of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, we are offered a brief survey of traditional Trinitarian theology before turning to the social or communal understanding of the Trinity best expressed today by John Zizioulas. In this theology, neither unity nor diversity has precedence for both are in the nature of God, and being made in the image and likeness of God, humanity reflects both the unity and diversity of the Trinity itself. Diversity of cultures is then part of God's plan and we are called to share in the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a communion of individuals and cultures. Intercultural communion is a reality

and an aspirational goal that needs to be more inclusive so that it truly reflects the Reign of God proclaimed and inaugurated by Jesus.

Paul Beirne draws on his experience in two cultures, Papua New Guinea and Korea, to examine cultural concepts of 'welcoming spaces' as challenge and opportunity for Church and mission. The author offers a rich and textured account of participant-observation of the *Barasi* a central socio-cultural ritual celebrated on Manam Island which is thirteen kilometres off the northern coast of PNG. The *Barasi* is a festival about becoming a new person and is celebrated in the months of May, June and July. The *Kongyang* is a ritual sacred meal used to assist a deceased relative to enter Buddhist paradise. The two rituals are not directly compared but their descriptions give us a sense of 'welcoming space' in each culture in which food is a central component. The inference for comparison to eucharist is advanced, and the chapter concludes with ways in which Larry Nemer has in a variety of contexts used food to provide a welcoming space on many occasions.

Randall Prior returns us to the Australian context with a challenging chapter on re-imagining 'the future of our Church'. Beginning with the reality of decline in participation in established churches he invites us to reflect on the reason for this reality which he sees as being due to the fact that the western world, including Australia, is going through a period of profound change and redefinition and the church is involved in this process. We then engage in an overview of four historical stages of 'Christendom', before being reminded that the gospel of Jesus Christ is primarily a message about the God's promised future for human life and for the world. A short examination of each of the gospels draws us again to a future focus in which the church is called to be a sign of the future for the world even though it is not fully cognisant of this future and does not always live with this orientation. It is with this stance that questions about the future find resources in the words of the gospel and the call to the community of disciples to live the new world of God's future.

In chapter twelve, the late Ross Langmead, saw the emergent church as a multicultural church which embraces the meaning of 'catholicity' and provides a 'welcoming space'. Examining the meaning of 'multicultural' he sees it as an aspirational vision grounded in a missional reading of the Bible, wherein hospitality is a metaphor for mission. We are gifted with nine brief reflections on a Biblical theology of multiculturalism before returning to contemporary church and the need to exercise hospitality by making space for 'the other' wherein we can enrich each other. We are then invited to look at different paths to being multicultural congregations, and given a number of examples of creating welcoming spaces.

In the final chapter which is chapter thirteen, John Prior confronts us with the Asian experience of the massive displacement of peoples and the crucial missional issue of a suitable ecclesial response to human trafficking. An exploration of the reality and characteristics of this form of exploitation of both adults and children draws on the UN protocols as a reference point for the examination of this tragic dehumanising trade. We all bear some responsibility through the exploitative economic patterns of a globalised community, and we are drawn to reflect on basic Christian principles and their situational application. Key concepts are: the dignity of the person, care for the vulnerable, naming sin, and building gospel community. Compassion is perhaps the best summation of the ministry of Jesus and constant challenge for us in a post-modern world.

Every *Festschrift* is a complex and varied collection because those who have written have all known the person whom they honour in a variety of roles. I do not intend to enumerate them here but return to Larry's luncheon meeting with R. Pierce Beaver when he thanked the

mentor who helped him to commit to teaching, research and pastoral work. Confreres, companions, friends, students, colleagues and peers, we have all received blessing from the diversity of Larry's lifelong commitment to the path of discipleship and been enriched by his humanity and friendship. I hope that you can glean some fruit from these chapters and from the glimpses of the person whose company, compassion, hospitality, generosity of spirit, scholarship and pastoral care we have all benefitted.

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