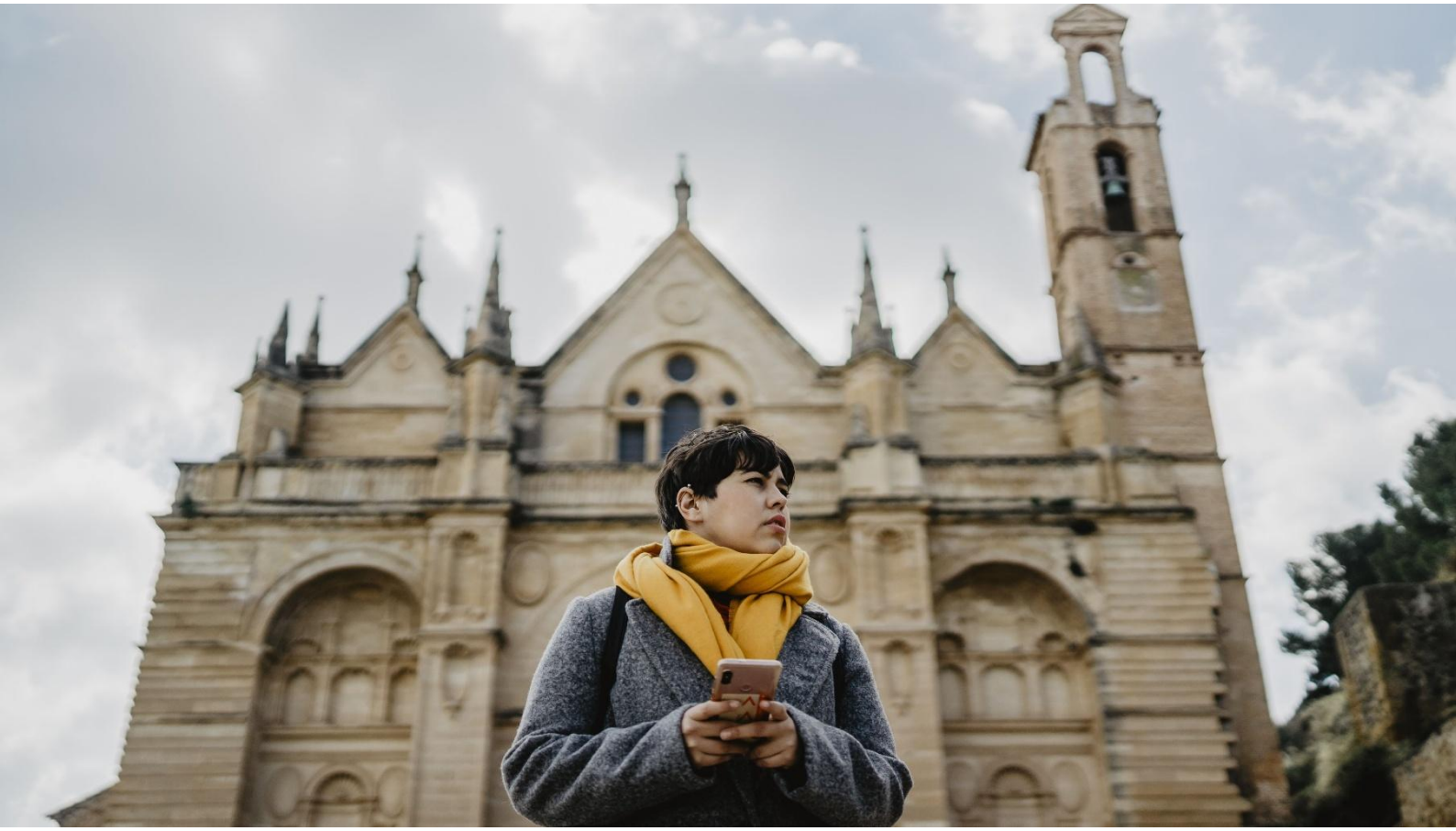

STUDENTS, CHURCH, AND MOVEMENT

ISSUE 10 · OCTOBER 2025

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STUDENTS, CHURCH, AND MOVEMENT

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EDITORIAL: THE ART OF DOUBLE LISTENING IN A POLARISED WORLD

I still remember the fascination I felt when, as a very young student leader, I first encountered John Stott's idea of 'double-listening'. It was as if a new horizon had suddenly opened.

"We listen to the Word with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand. We listen to the world with critical alertness, anxious to understand it too, and resolved not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathize with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it."[1]

This vision of Stott's captures precisely what we want Word and World to be: a place where complex issues are explored, discussed, even debated with this kind of double listening. Because, as it is now common to say, the world is deeply polarised. Yet, we believe and trust in the One in whom “we live and move and have our being (Ac 17 :28)

A MISSION THAT SPANS GENERATIONS

The issue of the articulation of our mission with that of local churches has kept the minds of IFES and student workers busy for many years throughout our history. The world changes rapidly, student generations, trends, fears and dreams also. But the Word does not change, and God still wants to call students to be his followers in today's world. How can IFES remain faithful yet humbly audacious in this context?

This challenge spans generations, which is why this issue offers a blend of older and newer reflections on a topic that each generation of IFES has to make their own. We're happy to share, for the first time outside of the French language, the late Daniel Bourdanné's reflections on our mission. Long before he became IFES General Secretary, Daniel loved writing and writers, he was also a deep thinker. This is a homage to him and the depths of his thinking.

Marc Debanné, former General Secretary of GBU Québec, also shares with us new thoughts on how to demystify the church-parachurch relationship. Barry Chueng, General Secretary of FES Hong Kong, sheds light on how the theory can be applied in unique contexts by sharing the outworkings of partnerships between IFES and the local churches in Hong Kong’s socio-political reality. Bishop David Zac Niringye takes a diachronic approach to his reflections thirty-five years ago on the 'parachurch' and the mission of the Church in the student world, mirrored against his observations of the current times. Finally, we hope to take you beyond the journal by sharing book reviews that can enrich your understanding of or deepen your research into each topic.

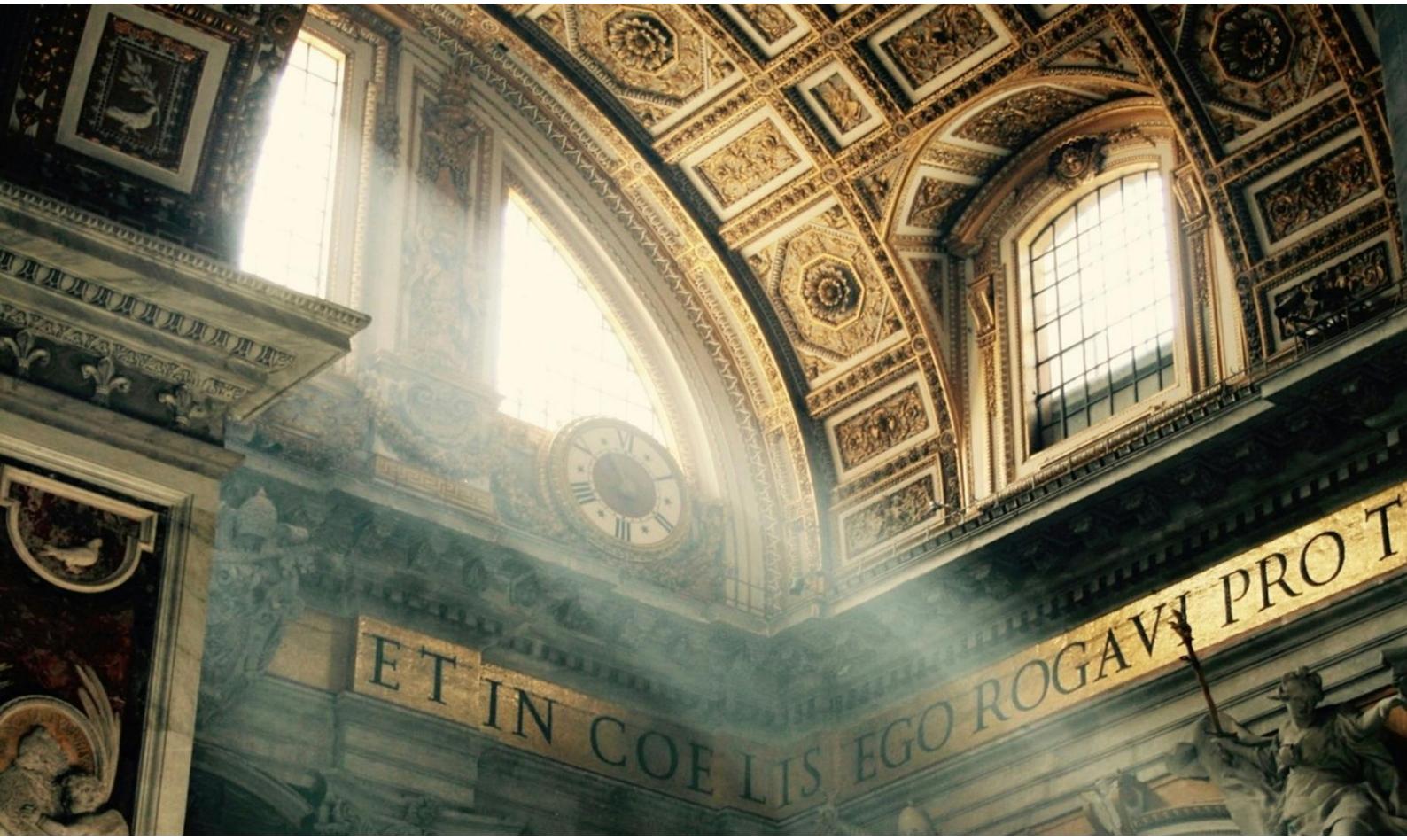
AN INVITATION TO COMMON REFLECTION

We hope that you'll not only enjoy reading this new issue but also dive back into previous issues – perhaps even share the journal with friends and colleagues. Let it be a place for IFES to reflect on its mission and the many contexts in which it unfolds.

I also want to thank Jasmine Foo who has joined our team as volunteer editor: keep on the lookout for the next issue in the works!

Would you pray with me that this and the next issues of Word and World would help us thrive together in the mission with which God has entrusted us?

wordandworld@ifesworld.org



IFES AS PARA-ECCLESIASTICAL MINISTRY FOR STUDENT EVANGELISATION

DANIEL BOURDANNÉ

"Change the university and you will change the world."

– *Charles Habib Malik, Lebanese President of the thirteenth session of the United Nations General Assembly*

SPECIALISED MINISTRIES AND CHURCH COLLABORATIONS: A NECESSITY

The Christian ministries sometimes called 'para-ecclesiastical,' are specifically dedicated to a single field of mission – whether for reaching students, prisoners, and those with disabilities, or for education, Bible translation, social and economic development, theological training, production of literature, etc.

Specific to student evangelism, these specialised ministries – such as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), Cru, the Navigators, Youth with a Mission and others – tend to be widely accepted by evangelical churches. Several of these movements have made remarkable contributions towards the sharing of the Gospel, with many people having converted thanks to the testimonies of these groups at universities. Numerous evangelical church or mission leaders have also recognised the key role their involvement as students in these groups have played in orientating them towards their present vocations.

However, due to the often 'interdenominational' nature of those 'para-ecclesiastical' ministries, some local churches or denominations have reservations in supporting them. With their noble intent to preserve

doctrinal purity, and especially to maintain influence over the students (including financially), some churches have set up their own campus ministries. This sometimes leads to a proliferation of fragmented denominational initiatives on university campuses, without any real collaboration between evangelical groups. This increase of denominational groups in the university is far from viable in the long term – particularly since the resulting disorder and disarray among Christian groups is often used by universities as a pretext to justify the prohibition of Christian witness on campus.

Given the particular nature of the university, the best strategy for evangelicals would be ongoing cooperation and collaboration, whereby the numerous different denominations work together with the specialised ministries that already hold the experience, skills, and knowledge required. Through this togetherness, the para-ecclesiastical ministries can be accountable to the wider Church body, thus creating a positive channel of communication and a climate of trust. Such a climate can contribute greatly towards a more effective use of resources and a more effective mission overall. We see also that where good interdenominational cooperation and specialised ministries exist, student evangelism is significantly more effective.

Where Christian groups do co-exist on campuses, they must avoid entering into competition with one another. Each organisation will often have a speciality or a particular expertise that others do not necessarily have. We are all bound by the common desire for students to discover and follow Christ and be transformed. The purpose of our missional presence at universities is the expansion of the Kingdom of God, not the empire-building of any particular ministry through competition which are counter-productive to the Christian witness in the university.

Cooperation is itself a strategy for evangelism, as it allows non-Christian students to see and understand the values of Christian love, visibly shining through Christian unity on campus. One of the criticisms often brought against Christian students is the image portrayed of an incomprehensible fragmentation. Therefore, when different Christian groups work in harmony on campus, they contribute towards removing this perception, eliminating at least one of the barriers that prevent certain students from lending their attention to the saving message of Jesus Christ.

STUDENT OUTREACH AS A STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Closer to home, IFES, as a para-ecclesial movement, has God's love for students as our primary motivation for student outreach. The Church's attitude towards these millions of students worldwide should draw inspiration from that of Jesus Christ: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36).

The university is a strategic institution. It is there that young people are equipped and shaped. It's often in the university that decision-makers are trained and that their vocation is determined for the rest of their lives. In many countries of the world, students form the elite of their society, holding considerable potential for influence. It is from within this trained elite, that leaders and decision-makers in the fields of economics, politics, science, and religion are recruited. By becoming Christian during their university days, these students have the time and opportunity to develop a Christian worldview. In their formative training as disciples of Jesus Christ, they become capable of making wise life choices, dedicating their lives and their vocations to the Lord. If universities, in their current form, had existed during the time of apostles, there is no doubt that people like the Apostle Paul would have intentionally invested time there, preaching the Good News to students. His ties with the intellectual world, particularly in Areopagus, testify to his awareness of the strategic nature of the intellectual elite.

Faced with the increasing secularisation of universities and the significant decline in the Christian presence on campuses, evangelicals ought to be actively invested in this area. The Christian witness in the university setting is now a necessity. This witness must be engaging and profound. We need to go beyond short-lived incursions and a superficial presence. The evangelical presence must be such that it is capable of entering into genuine dialogue with the ideas that are being championed in the universities, prompting reconsideration of ideologies and worldviews that are not subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is from

this perspective that student evangelisation will have a perceptible impact on the evolution of non-Biblical ideas being developed in these centres of higher education and research.

DISTINCTIVE CHALLENGES FOR STUDENT EVANGELISATION

Student evangelisation missions generally face a number of difficulties. There is the issue of free access to universities. As a result of secularisation, universities are increasingly closing their doors to any religious presence, and especially to evangelical Christianity. From a purely human perspective, this situation shows no prospect of improving any time soon. The difficulty, born from tenuous definitions of secularism and from a fear of certain forms of religious expression, seems to be largely affecting the whole of the French-speaking world, which is being influenced by similar ideas. This lack of openness to evangelicals is, in some countries, worsened by the chaotic splintering of different Christian denominations on campus, a disunity that does not always take into account the specific nature of the academic world. In the long run, this splintering becomes a major obstacle to the overall evangelical Christian presence on campus, even in countries that are generally more open or tolerant regarding Christian witness in universities.

A sizeable proportion of students, notably in the West, are therefore dissatisfied with Christianity. Their dissatisfaction most likely stems from the image that Christianity projects: a negative religion that emphasises prohibitions, rather than affirming the positives such as enjoyment, celebration, communion, and beauty. In a fluid context dominated by pluralism, a Christianity that waves the doctrinal rules and restrictions around like a flag becomes suspicious. Students of this generation are not necessarily opposed to religion, rather they radically question the way in which Christianity is presented and lived in society. In general, theirs is a generation that wants to be involved and participate. However, an ecclesiastical structure which is highly institutionalised and rigidly hierarchical does not correspond to their needs or wants. They are instead drawn to spiritual and emotional experiences, a different form of spirituality.

Increasingly secularised universities are influencing the world with ideas, ideologies, and world views that often oppose those of Christianity. The new atheist ideology, for example, has been intentionally promoted among students in the West. Meanwhile, there is a constant exposure to, and sometimes bombardment by, various literature and publications that seek to influence student with their respective causes. As well as these orchestrated campaigns, current culture trends are characterised by rapid changes, the loss of traditional values and principles, relativism, materialism, and a thirst for instant gratification. Students tend to prioritise their individuality and focus on achieving their professional ambitions. However, despite the prevailing individualism, there remains a strong desire for community – a desire manifested in their mobility and connectivity. Hence the extraordinary success of virtual social networks. Because of this social evolution, many students live in a state of uncertainty, confused by the lack of social markers, reference points, certainties, and meaning. This lack of meaning is further fed by dissatisfaction due to growing unemployment, the weakening of family ties, excessive competition, and the absence of attractive role models in society.

The lack of human skills capable of bearing witness effectively in the university environment presents another limitation to the effective evangelisation of students. The university is a very specific mission field. Firstly, in terms of its composition, universities are essentially made up of intellectuals, those involved in deep reflection. Secondly, through its teaching methods, students are encouraged to question and, to a certain extent, discover the world through constant questioning. This approach, executed through critical analysis, can be radical and passionate. Few evangelical believers are prepared to work in such an environment. There is a tendency to regard universities as one would any other mission field, but replicating the evangelistic methods of the local church does not always work here. When seeking to evangelise highly educated Athenians, the Apostle Paul recognised the necessity of a particular approach. Both the structure and the content of his discourse show that he took account of the specific nature of his audience (Acts 17:16-34). The anti-intellectual tendency in some forms of evangelical spirituality is in fact a hindrance to Christian witness on campus. Such tendencies discourage the appropriate use of intelligence and amplify a

form of mysticism that is irrelevant and ill-suited to the academic world. University students often require the presentation of faith to be accompanied by clear reasoning.

Furthermore, there is the issue of the particularity of evangelising in a manner that is relevant to the age group and cultures of the students. Students are increasingly young and therefore characterised by a strong openness to the world, wanting to express themselves and to experiment. They want to be heard, be listened to, and sometimes to challenge. With the rise of postmodern culture hurtling towards pluralism, and the rejection of authority and all things institutional, it is becoming increasingly difficult for church leaders to find strategies appropriately adapted to this generation.

Students are also increasingly interested in using new technology for their information and communication. These technologies have profoundly altered their social habits and ways of communication. Social media and networking, for example, have given students impressive abilities of communication and self-organisation, as well as affecting their ways of learning, with increasingly importance on the visual. In the United States, many students now finish their university courses without having read a single printed book. New technologies equally shift the centres of power to the periphery – even the worst of dictators are incapable of controlling this power that now finds itself on campuses and among students. It's difficult to predict the full consequences of these changes in student life, but we know for certain that they will in turn deeply impact the social fabric. Evangelicals, therefore, cannot and must not ignore these changes when considering their witness to students.

Today's student profile no longer corresponds to that of a traditional residential student: one who lives on campus and dedicates his or herself exclusively to their studies. With the development of virtual communication, made possible by new media, there is now a large number of students that follow their courses online, even through distance-learning. This trend is set to increase with the constant and rapid improvement of such technologies. The gradual mastery of virtual training will lead to a change in student profiles that will certainly bring about profound upheaval in evangelisation strategies and methods.

A student today is subject to enormous pressures of various kinds. Aside from their studies, many have to work to finance their studies. In the Global South, very few benefit from scholarships or grants, or are eligible for bank loans. Many come from significantly poorer families. Infrastructure for accommodating students is also limited, and many must live far from the university, often incurring more expenses. Living away from campus restricts their involvement in the student community and also reduces the time and attention they could otherwise give to hearing the Word of God. All these new realities for the modern student call for new imaginative and creative approaches for outreach.

These difficulties should not, however, cause the Church to shy away from its missional responsibility towards students. Through ongoing work and prayer, pooling of resources, and collaboration with existing specialised parachurch ministries, evangelicals can make progress in their efforts for student outreach.

STUDENTS OUTREACH: AN IMMENSE TASK

There is no magical approach to evangelize students. Student culture changes very quickly and an approach that is valuable today can become obsolete tomorrow. Strategies and methods must constantly evolve, taking into account and reflecting societal changes. Even if the central message remains the same, the way of presenting it to students must adapt, hence outreach to students must always remain creative and innovative.

Generally, the best strategy is one that consists of students themselves reaching their peers. This is why Christian students must be the primary actors in evangelism on campus, since they live together, developing friendships, discussing, and debating. Above all, Christian students have the irreplaceable experience of bearing tangible witness by opening up to their non-Christian friends like open bibles. Numerous testimonies of conversion from students wonderfully underline the importance of the witness of life and the friendship of Christians. This living testimony of faith can produce significantly more results than isolated and disembodied public preaching. Therefore, external interventions must be limited to training and mentoring the Christian students and providing them with resources. The role of church leaders should be limited to training, supporting in prayer and encouraging them into action. Every specialised ministry group

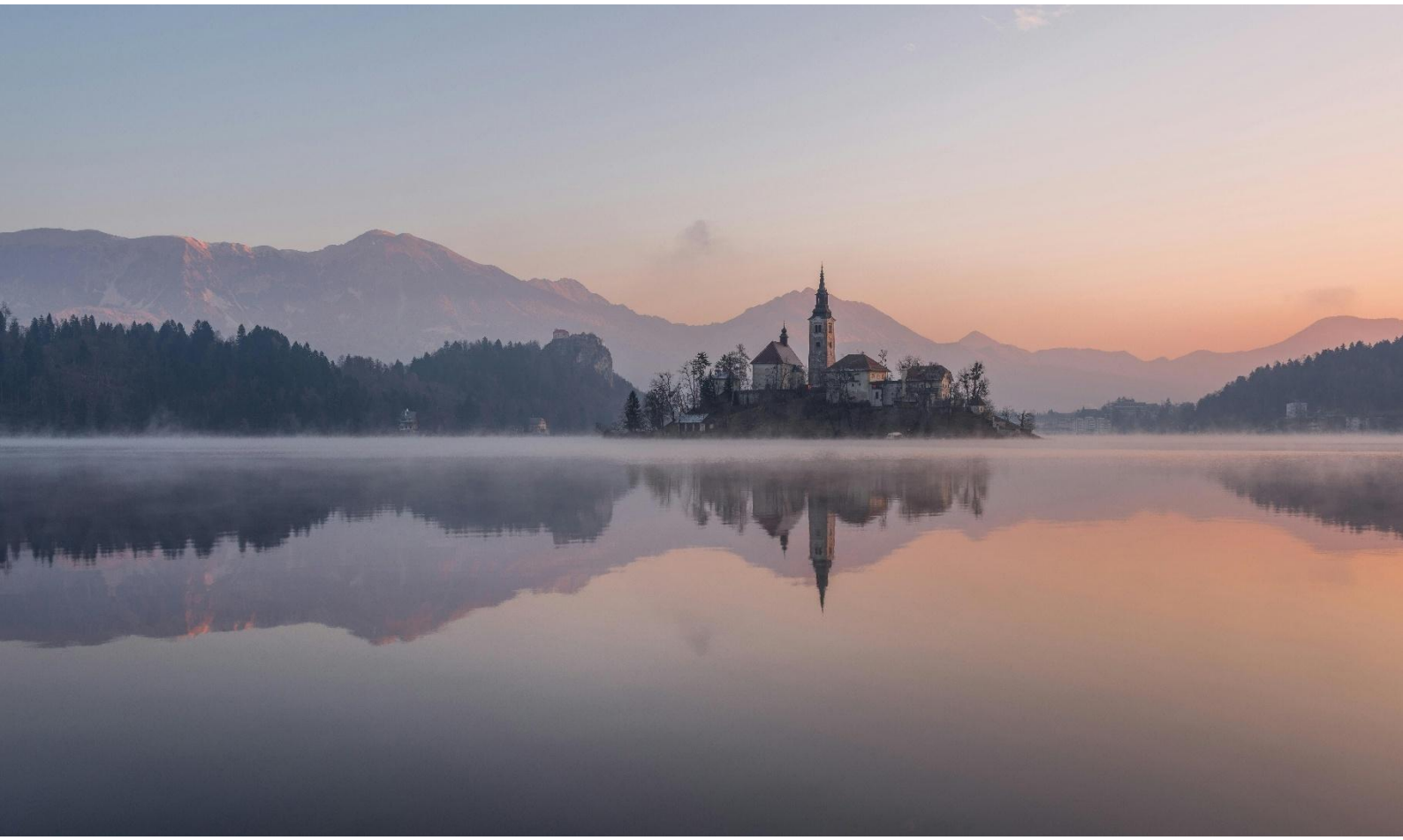
that has had a significant presence and profound impact on university outreach has understood and embraced this principle of student initiative and leadership.

Christian professors and researchers working at the university should therefore be involved in training and preparing students for evangelism. Being constantly surrounded by students and respected in their fields for academic competence, they are well-positioned. Several non-believing students have been touched by witness of such professors and been converted. Concerning apologetics and debating the faith, these university staff can further help in discussions on the many difficult subjects Christians face, even with colleagues who are opposed to the faith. Their presence on campus offers a degree of security to Christian students who can sometimes feel challenged and led astray by the radical ideas that oppose their faith. They can encourage students to hold their own, be unafraid and unashamed when communicating the Good News on campus.

There remains much to be done in the area of student evangelisation. The task necessitates immense and varied skills and resources. No human being, no group of individuals, no single denomination can accomplish this task alone. Only God is capable. He is at work, opening doors and windows to create often unexpected opportunities. It is God who invites us to join this mission, a privilege in which God gives each of us a part of what he is already doing. This privilege of working with God encourages humility through collaboration with others. It also encourages us not to despair in the face of difficulties, because the work belongs to God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Kadebe Bourdanne (1959–2024), born in Chad, had a full life. After studying biology and philosophy, he was a family man, an outstanding teacher in academia and Christian circles, a writer, an editor, and a faithful servant of God throughout his life. He served as itinerant secretary in French-speaking Africa, then as general secretary of IFES (2007-2019).



THE CHRISTIAN STUDENT, THE LOCAL CHURCH, AND STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENTS: HOW TO DEMYSTIFY THE PLACE OF THE “PARA-CHURCH”

MARC DEBANNÉ

A young Christian student in Quebec who wants to actively live his or her faith on campus faces a dilemma: how much importance should he or she give to his or her local church while studying?

For members of churches that insist on the primacy of the local church in the life of the believer, the very legitimacy of involvement as Christians on campus (i.e. in a non-church environment), can quickly become a problem of conscience.

This may be a symptom of an unbiblical local church doctrine, as far as it fails to recognize the Church of Jesus Christ in its universal reality. We would argue that the solution to the dilemma lies in a return to a scriptural ecclesiology (i.e. doctrine of the Church), or, to put it more accurately, a biblically complete ecclesiology. It's a bit like a Christology that emphasizes Jesus' human nature without fully appreciating his divine nature: a doctrine of the Church that fails to account for the Church's dual nature—local and universal—inevitably leads to practical situations that don't accord with God's plan.

This doctrine of the two-dimensional Church is paradoxical: how can the Church be understood as local and universal at the same time? Yet, it is liberating and empowering for the believer. It sows the seeds of creativity and new initiatives: it enables every faithful man or woman to be prepared by their Church to take their place in the worldwide work of Christ, both inside and outside that Church. It enables him or her to become an autonomous actor (while dependent on Christ) in initiatives for the Kingdom of God. This person will be submissive to the authority of, and in communion with, their local Church, able to represent its community values and doctrinal convictions in their environment, without necessarily being under the immediate supervision of a Church official to legitimize their action. They will be prepared to act as a mature Christian, carrying out "[the] tasks of service for the edification of the body of Christ", both inside and outside the meetings of the local Church (Eph 4.12b).

This emphasis on the life of the believer beyond the activities of his or her own local church does not erase the priority of life within it: it merely aims to re-establish a balance that is often neglected.

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

The Church, as taught in the New Testament, is understood to be in continuity with the community of God's people, as founded and assembled by God in the Old Testament. It is the *qahal* of God, the congregation of his unique covenant, who 'gather' before God on the 'Days of Assembly' (Deut 4:10; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). This Hebrew term *qahal* is usually translated in the Septuagint as *ekklesia*, a term adopted by the New Testament to speak of 'the Church' – the people of God 'gathered' in exclusive covenant around Jesus Christ. We see Peter, for example, attributing the same prerogatives and responsibilities to the Church being built around Christ, as those attributed to the community of Israel ('royal priests, a holy nation, a people redeemed [by God]', 1 Pet 2:4-10; cf. Ex 19:5-6).

The guiding principle of this New Testament reality , already taught by Jesus himself (Matt 16:18), holds that there is only one Church, just as there is only one Israel. Jesus also prayed for its unity (John 17:1-26): not that such unity (inscribed in the very nature of the Church) was absent before men expressed it concretely, but rather that such unity (visibly lived) embodies the message, preached to the *cosmos*, 'so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21). Moreover, the letter to the Ephesians shows us that God has a concrete plan for his one universal Church in this *cosmos*: to unite everything under one head, Christ (Eph 1:10), using the teaching ministries in his Church as a driving force and using the believers, thus instructed (Eph 4:11-12), to bring the whole *cosmos* into submission.

Alongside these truths, much of what the New Testament teaches about the life of believers in the Church relates to its local expressions. Already, the existence of many New Testament epistles, mainly intended for use in local churches and featuring important exhortatory sections addressed to members, reminds us that the success of the local church is a priority for the apostles and their co-workers.

Accordingly, there is a paradox, a double affirmation concerning the lived reality of the Church, which must be kept in tension – unity and plurality, local and universal.

UNIVERSAL CHURCH AND LOCAL CHURCH

The primary reality of biblical ecclesiology is the universal Church. It must also be the first principle of the believer's theological understanding of the Church. Even if life in the local Church will fill most of their time and energies (the case for most Christians), this will only be lived correctly when understood in the context of the universal Church, of which it is a local manifestation. The practice of the local Church will always have to account for the reality of the universal Church; it will never be exempt from it.

> 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. 12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:11–13, NRSV)

Paul speaks here of a person's conversion as an immersion in the *one* Spirit of God, which attaches the new believer to the *one* body of Christ – the universal Church described in its organic unity. This implies two

things. First, the new convert becomes a member of the universal Church before becoming a member of a local Church, in the way that the baptism of the Holy Spirit (conversion, regeneration—the invisible reality) precedes water baptism (the visible manifestation). Second, the gift he will exercise is intended, in principle, to serve the whole body – even if, in practice, it is usually exercised in a local context.

(1) The language of the New Testament concerning the local Church reveals two important things about the universal Church:

> **(a)** The New Testament expresses a balance between the unity and plurality of the Church of God, and indicates an interpenetration of the two realities. It is, in this sense, that many people understand the Lord's teaching in Matthew 18:19-20:
>
> > [19] Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. [20] For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Aware that this teaching is part of a discourse by Jesus on the Church and its internal life, the great Reformed theologian John Murray argues that "we must affirm that wherever believers are gathered together according to the institution of Christ and in his name, there is the Church of God, and to this Church of God belong all the functions, prerogatives and promises which God has granted to the Church" (*The Nature and Unity*, p. 324-325 (author's translation).

> **(b)** At the same time, there is a certain restraint on the part of New Testament authors in referring directly to the local Churches as 'the Church'. It is clear - although not always visible in modern translations - that the authors try to avoid expressions such as 'Church of Corinth, Church of Antioch', preferring nuanced formulations like "in the church at Antioch" (Acts 13:1); or "the church of God that is in Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1: 2).

(2) Two key texts that describe the organisation of the ministries of Word and service in the Church (1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:1-16) include teaching ministries that might be called 'inter-Church' on their lists – for example, the roles of apostles and prophets (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). Some might also include mention of *euaggelistai*, 'evangelists' (Eph 4:11) and *didaskaloi*, or 'teachers' (1 Cor 12:28).

The case of 1 Corinthians 12 is compelling because Paul therein seeks to resolve discord within a local Church. He does so by describing the structures of the universal and the local Church in unity and continuity – their various ministries, both local and universal, at the service of the same body and infused with the same unique Spirit.

For the ministry of the Word, these passages suggest a scope beyond the boundaries of the local Church, able to nourish and formalise relations between local Churches. Ministerial links between Churches, and between Christians of different local Churches, are therefore also suggested.

(3) In his influential article 'The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission' (1974), Ralph Winter argues that, from the time of the Apostolic Church, two structures coexisted to ensure the growth and continuity of the Christian movement. First, a basic 'generalist' structure –the local Church, inspired by the Jewish synagogue – aiming for longevity over time, bringing together in a given locality all the diversity of believers (with a multiplicity of generations, ethnic groups, standards of living, professions, etc.), and linked to the other Churches. Second, a more specialized structure, the missionary team (in the New Testament, mainly Paul's team, but also others, such as Barnabas'). We tend to focus solely on the fact that the first missionary team (Paul's) was mandated by the local Church at Antioch (Acts 13.1-3), without too much attention paid to the signs of its internal structure or functioning. We can see, however, that this other structure was self-organising. It rapidly developed an autonomy of operation with respect to the local Church that sent it, was financially autonomous when necessary, and was associative and selective in its membership. No longer are its members 'all the local saints', but rather a sub-group of Christians who are fit, qualified, and called. They will eventually be selected from several original Local Churches and must, in order to participate in the mission of this structure, make an additional commitment to the basic spiritual commitment made upon joining the Local Church (Ralph D. WINTER, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission", *Missiology* 1974/2, p.123). This second structure creates 'horizontal' relationships between churches, from member to member. Winter calls these two structures modalities and sodalities, respectively, and argues that periods of

significant missionary growth in the Church's history have almost always involved these entities working in tandem.

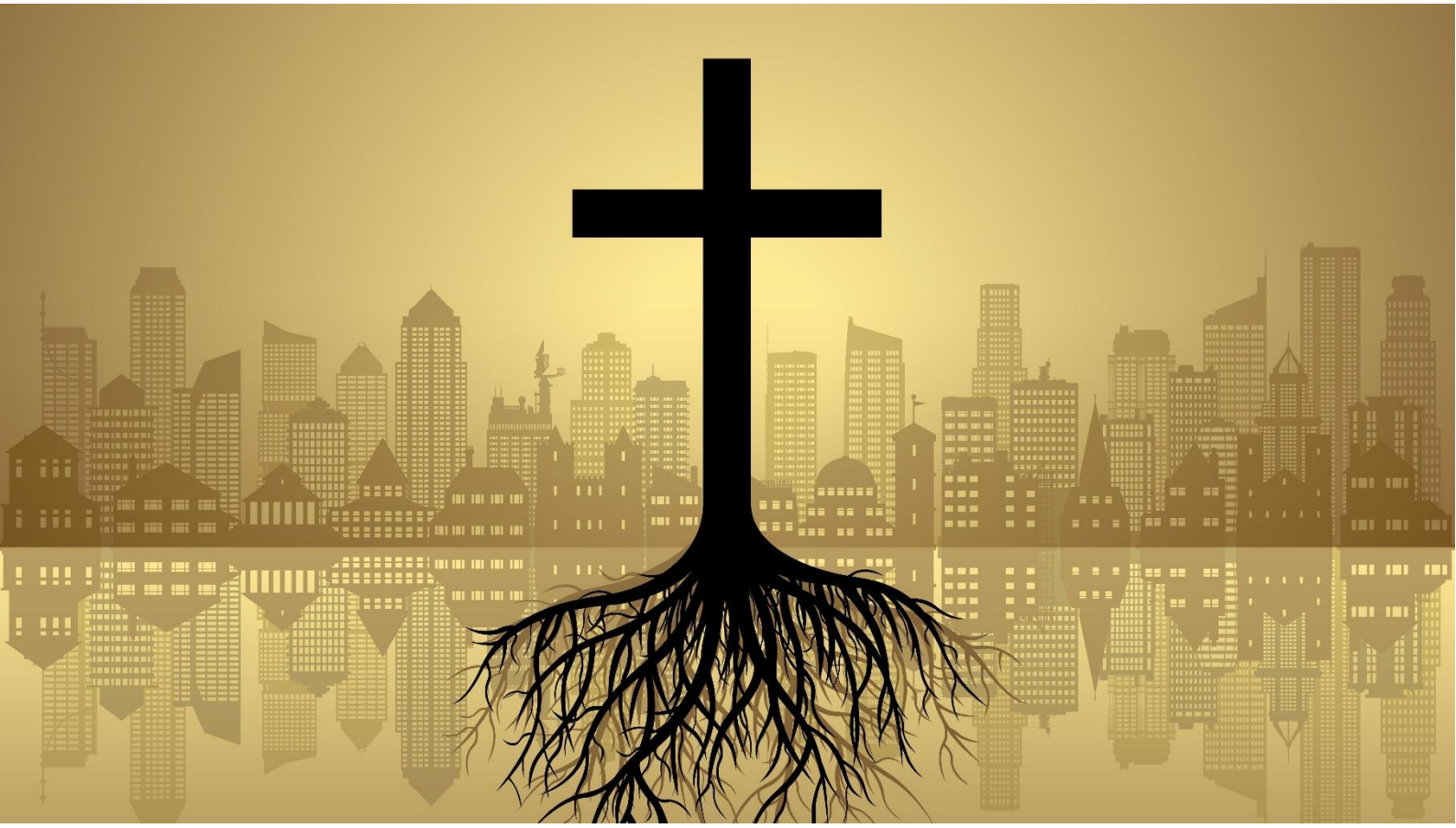
If, then, biblical teaching insists on the importance of both the local Church and inter-Church structures as two visible manifestations of the one Body of Christ, it becomes necessary to recognise that this double priority must guide us in our Church practice today.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article we have explored the biblical doctrine of the Church with a view to demystifying the existence, in the contemporary Christian movement, of two distinct manifestations of the Church: the local community and the inter-church structure. After considering the 'two natures' of Christ's Church and some of the practical implications of this duality, we hope to have established the biblical validity of those two manifestations, as well as the Lord's imperative for us to work towards their unity. We have also tried to demonstrate the legitimacy of inter-church structures that unite believers of different denominations in a common task, such as Christian student movements like GBUC. They are part of the reality of the Body of Christ and are useful to its mission in the world. We also hope that our efforts at reflection will be useful and will contribute to an ever more thoughtful approach to our missionary mandate: that of 'bringing the whole Gospel, from the whole Church, to the whole world '31.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marc Debanné is the pastor of L'Oasis, a French-speaking multicultural Church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance located in Pierrefonds, Quebec. From 1999 to 2014 he was the Director of les Groupes Bibliques Universitaires et Collégiaux (GBUC), the French-speaking IFES movement in Canada. He lives in Dorval with his wife Cheryl and has two adult daughters. Marc also holds a Ph.D. in Biblical studies from McGill University and teaches courses in Scripture and in Theology at ETEQ, a local seminary. Among his other special interests are multicultural ministry and outreach to students and young adults.



FES AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES IN HONG KONG

BARRY CHEUNG

At a pastoral forum on "Youth Ministry" last year, I discussed the relationship between theology and context. Sometimes we expect our faith to directly address the problems in our context. But, to quote the late theologian John Webster, "Christian theology… is responsible in its context but not in any straightforward way responsible to its context."[1] We need to clarify the distinction between "doing theology in context" and "contextual theology," since the variations in theological paths will also affect pastoral orientation and expectations. We therefore pondered afresh the question of how the church's mission should be concretely lived out in the light of the Gospel given today's context in Hong Kong? As a result of socio-political upheavals in Hong Kong over the last decade or so, the church has faced many unprecedented challenges to pastoral care and been forced to navigate these various issues. We see how our understanding of faith can never be separated from the truth of reality. One such reality is the unhealed physical state of Hong Kong's people as a community where powers of darkness are still rampant.

Because of the significant emigration, local Hong Kong churches have faced huge losses in manpower and resources, making it necessary to rebuild church dynamics to be more inclusive.

It is in such a context, where the desperate need for pastoral renewal and transformation is felt in local churches, that FES is presented with the opportunity to walk alongside them. FES helps in practical ways to inform the church about genuine situations facing younger generations, even those who may not participate regularly in church activities. We have found that local pastors and church leaders respond with increased

openness and welcome the help from parachurch organisations, thus developing a more trusting relationship with FES.

In late 2023, we initiated a survey on "The Faith Conditions of College Believers in Hong Kong", collecting more than 400 responses from tertiary students. Thanks to the help of a few professional volunteers in analysing that data, we were able to organise the above-mentioned Youth Ministry Forum in June 2024 and share the results of that analysis with over a hundred pastors and church leaders. We are keenly aware of the enormous difficulties and challenges of pastoring young people in the church context today. Consequently, FES is able to contribute our resources, in partnership with the local churches, to encourage ongoing ministry to our young people. Our common concern for these cherished youth, who desperately need the hope and comfort offered by the Gospel, is amplified by our keen awareness that the church's future belongs to those younger generations.

REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY OF CAPTIVITY

"Our understanding of faith can never be separated from the truth of reality. One such reality is the unhealed physical state of Hong Kong's people as a community where powers of darkness are still rampant."

Emigrants from Hong Kong, as well as those who remained, exist in a context that has some parallels with that of Judeans during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity and exile. As a result of changing political environments (both in present-day Hong Kong and ancient Judea), conflicting discourses, value judgments, and socio-political orientations develop among the people. Both those who left and those who remained carry a heavy emotional burden, having grappled with the uncertainty of constant upheaval and the fracturing of their communities. A people who has suffered may struggle to refrain from judging others based on their considerations and decisions around remaining or leaving. Nonetheless, we urgently need to coexist and remain connected in faith, recognizing that we are all wounded and that only the cross of Christ can reconcile and deeply reconnect our relationship in salvation.

In this sense, both churches in Hong Kong and churches hosting Hong Kong people abroad must learn and reflect afresh on the very nature and form of pastoral care. It is not only about knowledge or reminders to *know* Christ as Lord, but also about *practically reflecting* Christ as Lord by always being open to listening to others. When there is diversity among God's people, the pastor turns to Christ in humility for help ministering to different members of the congregation.

Pastoral care is therefore not detached from the foundation of God's Word. Yet again, it involves teaching 'God's Word' as moral principles for individuals, while also relying on 'God's Word' as the foundation for building communal relationships. To do this in the context of a broken and diverse community, we reaffirm our commitment to Christ as Lord of the Church and as mediator of our relationships with our brothers and sisters. We welcome the needy and the hurting as we would welcome Christ himself, for every 'little one' is valued in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In response to Hong Kong's delicate socio-political situation, FES has recently started to promote listening movements, organise non-violent communication training and mental health first aid courses. We have also invited young graduates to share about their mental health challenges, encouraging us to understand psychological professionalism through a spiritual lens. Importantly, our attempts to facilitate more dialogue between the various generations within the church (especially with senior church pastors) have received highly positive responses.

In March 2025, these activities culminated in a major event known as the "FES Day Pastoral Care Seminar: A Trauma-Informed Approach". Over 160 participants from different church denominations joined us, and we had many fruitful and encouraging conversations. There were four speakers from across the spectrum: a New Testament scholar, a practical theology practitioner, and two church pastors. Through their thoughtful preparation and insightful sharing, there was a balance between academic depth and practical experience, offering inspiration and light to all participants. We witnessed how seeds were sown for spiritual renewal in the pastoral culture of Hong Kong churches. While the task at hand is not easy, through these events we

have started to gather and unite fellow companions, to press forward with courage, one step at a time, and to rebuild a faith community that is connected through suffering.

REFLECTIONS ON COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

"Because of the significant emigration, local Hong Kong churches have faced huge losses in manpower and resources, making it necessary to rebuild church dynamics to be more inclusive."

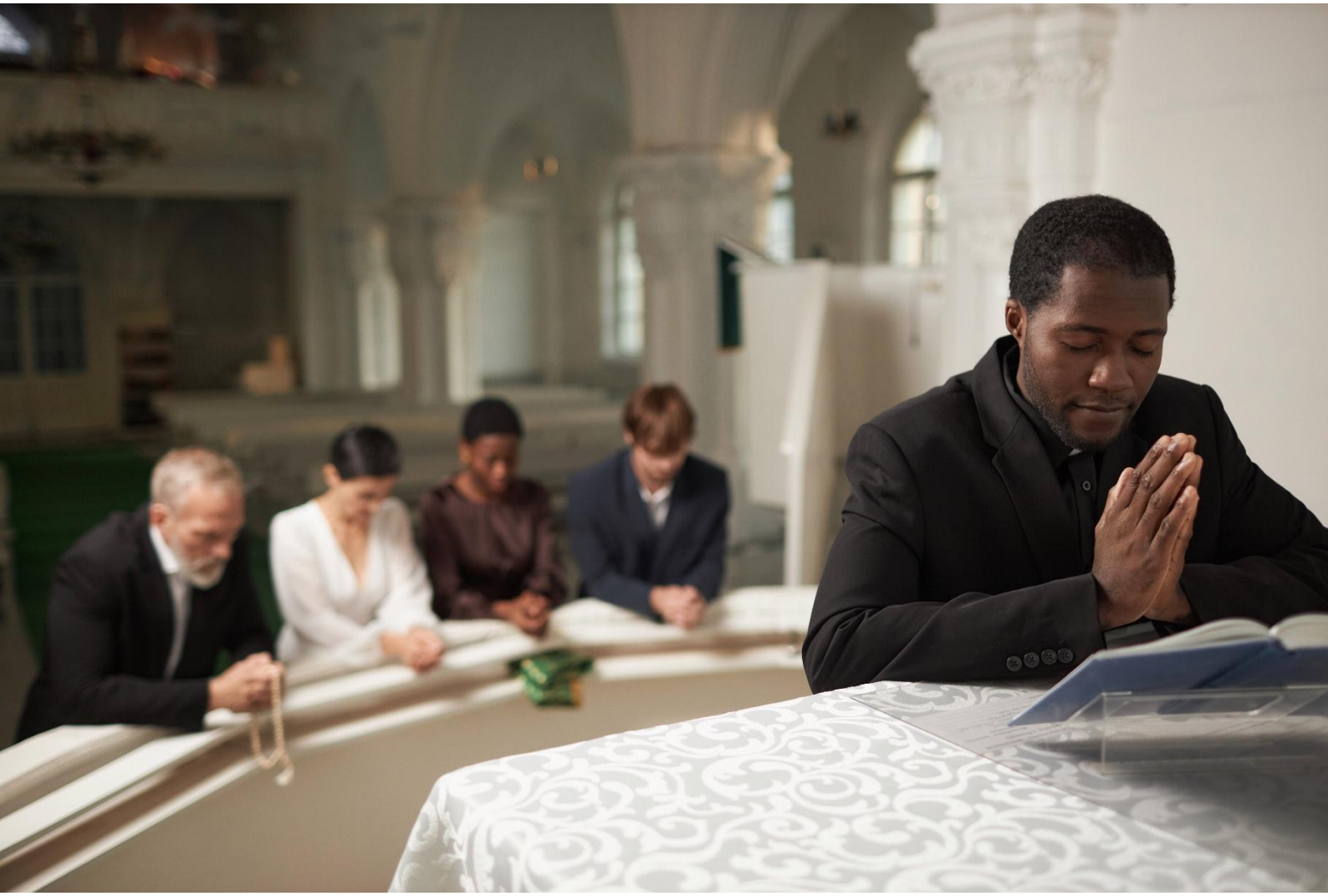
The church must embrace the call to provide a space of stability and trust for the hurting generation. A sanctuary where members can be transparent, release their voices, discover new versions of themselves, meet different people, live together in the church, and enjoy relationships with one another. After waves of social protests, many young people struggle to feel welcomed by, or a sense of belonging to, their own church communities. We observed a deep distrust between those who embrace more universal values and those who exercise authority within ecclesial institutions. FES thus sought to bridge and rebuild an authentic relationship between these parties. On the one hand, we gain the trust of church pastors and their alignment with the FES vision for the discipleship of younger generations. On the other hand, we minister to young people, regardless of whether they are regular church-goers, through our annual Youth Bible Conference. This year, being the third run of the annual conference, we even invited some church pastors to be conference committee members and worked together to encourage participation from their young people. The theme was "Undefined: Embracing the (Un)Certainty of Faith." Throughout this two-day conference, we aimed to equip participants intellectually and emotionally to experience a paradigm shift in their faith worldview. We believe that when young people learn to embrace the openness of faith, they will stand firm in the chaotic values of university culture, discerning and making wise choices. Through this partnership with the local churches, we witness their trust in FES to train up mature leaders who will ultimately serve in the church.

CONCLUSION

FES cannot exist without partnership with local churches. For many reasons, this mutual relationship is valuable for both sides. The vision we instil among the students whom we meet on campus is that they will leave college and find their spiritual homes at church, where people can encounter and get to know each other more deeply. Thanks to the challenging socio-political circumstances, the church and parachurch have been given the opportunity to choose humility and open-mindedness, to 'value others above yourselves' (Phil. 2:3), through connectedness in the grace of Christ. Only then will we see the growth and maturity which can come from God (Col. 2:19).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barry Cheung is the General Secretary of FES Hong Kong.



PARACHURCH ORGANISATIONS AND STUDENT MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA IN THE 1990s AND 2020s

DAVID ZAC NIRINGIYE

INTRODUCTION

When the *IFES Word & World's* editor invited me to consider reviewing and updating a paper I penned and presented at an academic conference just over three decades ago, on the role and prospects of parachurch organisations and student movements in shaping Christianity in Africa in the 1990s, I welcomed it as an opportunity to engage in discourse on the social impact of the IFES movement. The conference at which I presented the paper was a gathering of Christian mission historians, social scientists, theologians, and mission and church leaders. Convened by two centres at Edinburgh University – the Centre for African Studies and the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World – it considered the prospects and challenges of Christianity in Africa in the 1990s.[1] My credentials at the conference were that of a young practitioner in parachurch and student movements.

Fortuitously, at the time of the conference, I was taking on leadership responsibility in the IFES regional movements in English and Portuguese-speaking Africa (EPSA) (as is characterised in IFES nomenclature[2]), after twelve years of leading the work in Uganda. Reading the paper now, it is evident that the opportunity provided me the impetus to reflect on Africa's social crisis at the time, and the potential of IFES work to form a kind of Christianity in Africa that would contribute to social progress. The paper's objective was twofold: first, to cast an imagination of a Christianity that will contribute to social progress in Africa in the 1990s; second, to propose what contribution and what role evangelical parachurch organisations and student movements could play in shaping that kind of Christianity. The hindsight of three decades, during which I have served in different parachurch organisations and a local church (Church of Uganda, in the Anglican tradition), affords me latitude and longitudinal distance that enables me to reflect on the achievement of the visions and hopes cast then.

In this paper, I attempt to summarise the gist and logic of the 1996 paper, interrogate what informed the narrative, assumptions, and social imagination I subscribed to then, and propose a path for the second half of the 2020s into the 2030s.

Since this reflection is intended for an audience interested in the place of the student movement in Africa as part of the parachurch phenomenon, I devote most of the discourse to IFES in Africa. I hope the verdict of those reading this paper three decades later will adjudge the older me wiser than the younger version.

A SUMMARY OF THE PAPER 'PARACHURCH ORGANISATION AND STUDENT MOVEMENTS IN THE 1990s'

The paper defines the parachurch phenomenon as contingent upon an understanding of 'church', because the prefix *para-* connotes the idea of being very like, connected with, or helping. It posits the church as an entity whose *raison d'être* is rooted in its Trinitarian origin (God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); with a dual relationship and mandate to God and God's creation. It argues that church congregations and denominations are the visible expressions of this dual purpose—relationship and function—and that parachurch organisations exist to serve the local church. What distinguishes church and parachurch organisations are two parameters: structure and focus. Parachurch organisations are not structurally part of local churches and focus on aspects of the church's dual purpose, often with distinctive ideology and methodology. The paper observes that the initiatives of the 18th and 19th century missional parachurch organisations in Europe and North America birthed the largest section of Christianity in Africa (the denominational churches). It also notes that the influx and mushrooming of most of today's parachurch organisations in Africa was a phenomenon of the beginning of the second half of the 20th century.

The paper classifies student movements as a form of parachurch organisation, born out of the vision and work of a group of Christians, focusing their mission on students at secondary (high school) and tertiary (colleges and universities) levels. It highlights the African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE) as an example of a parachurch organisation and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) in Africa as representative of a student movement. Set in the African context of both the socio-political backdrop in general and Christianity in particular, the paper outlines the origins, work, and ministry of the two organisations, and the prospects of their future work, projecting a hopeful impact on the church's presence as an agent of social change. The paper's broad-brush portrayal of the African socio-political context utilised Robert S. McNamara's presentation (president of the World Bank in the 1970s) at the Tokyo Forum, 13-15 May 1991[3]. The verdict on Africa's socio-political and economic situation entering the 1990s and beyond is grim, characterised by growing poverty; declining economic growth; low productivity in agriculture; high population growth rates; environmental degradation; a crippling debt crisis; unfavourable terms of trade; an AIDS pandemic further depressing the economies; political instability; and the ongoing rivalry and competition for the soul of Africa between traditional beliefs and practices, Islam, Christianity, and secularism.

The portrait of the churches is mixed, according to the prognosis by Tokumboh Adeyemo[4], one of Africa's eminent evangelical church leaders at the time. On the one hand, Adeyemo celebrated the church's numerical strength due to high growth rates, its spiritual fervour expressed in indigenous idiom, and its resilience against persecution. On the other hand, the churches in Africa are plagued by divisions and disunity; a deficiency in biblical-theological depth (for "Africa not only imports Western technology but also

Western theology"); a shortage of trained personnel – both quality and quantity; and a lack of visible social impact (because "the corruption and rivalry that bedevils African governments is also in the Church").

The paper argues that in spite the short three decades of its presence in 26 countries in Africa, there was already some visible impact of the IFES movement on Christianity in Africa. This is probably due to its evangelical theological roots and distinctiveness (in contrast to the so-called liberal World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)), and its commitment to growing indigenous leadership at national levels. It points out that some of the leading evangelical personalities in the Church had been nurtured as in the Christian Unions. In some countries, notably Nigeria and Kenya, the national student movements were already initiating programmes for nurturing indigenous missionaries. The paper suggests that to harness the IFES movements' potential for growth, impact, and the transformation of Africa for the glory of God, it would be essential to build capacity in three areas: (1) contextualised Christian scholarship and literature, to feed the minds and enrich the lives of Africans; (2) new models of missionary work, to develop a strong and able indigenous missionary force to reach Africa and beyond; and, (3) intentional integration of faith and life, to produce a disciplined work-force of men and women of integrity, who would contribute to arresting the social decay in Africa's public life.

The paper commended a strategic agenda that would engender three things: first, a critical analysis of the needs and aspirations of Africa in general and Christian Africa in particular, to produce contextual and transferable models; second, institutional and leadership capacity building for upgrading accountability systems, building synergies with other organisations with congruent ethos and harnessing the leadership potential in the churches; and, third, making research-based planning a priority for consolidating gains from the past and developing strategies for the future. The paper recommended that, in the immediate term, biblically informed actions should be undertaken to redress waning family stability, the dearth of relevant contextual literature, and growing poverty, ignorance, and poor health in African churches and societies.

A CONVERSATION WITH THE 1990s PERSPECTIVE: REIMAGINING IFES STUDENT MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA IN THE 2020s

Three decades since the publication of my paper, reveals a troublingly similar portrait of Africa's socio-political context and the state of Christianity in Africa. Christianity has continued to grow as the dominant faith across the continent south of the Sahara, but it social impact is dismal. Africa's socio-political malaise remains, with faces writhing "in anguish from civil wars, drought, the dictators' boots and poverty."[5] The African socio-political and economic world is swelled with men and women who are products of the IFES movements in many countries; yet, injustice, violence, and corruption continue to characterise the government and society. Eminent African theologian Emmanuel Katongole poses the question well:

> Why, despite the growth of Christianity and the social activism of the churches, Africans are in general 40% worse off than they were in the 1980s. One then wonders: What accounts for the dismal social impact of Christianity in Africa? Why has Christianity, despite its overwhelming presence, failed to make a significant dent in the social history of the continent?[6]

A cursory survey of the current state of IFES national movements in countries will show that there has been growth in the number and size of IFES national movements south of the Sahara. This begs the question: In light of the prognosis I painted in 1992, why is the social impact of Christianity dismal despite the growth of IFES movements in Africa over the last three decades? Were the assumptions lacking in depth? Were my proposed strategies and agenda impotent for shaping a Christianity with a social conscience? Was the failure internal, due to the ethos, logos, and pathos of the IFES? Or was it due to IFES movements' failure to pursue the strategy and agenda that was recommended then? There may also be other questions that the apparent contradictions in the context invite us to grapple with. I contend that asking the right questions is more critical than prescribing strategies and agendas for action.

I am persuaded that the crux of the matter lies with the assumptions that informed my prognosis: first, about African states as constructs for ordering power patterns for the common good; second, that evangelical Christianity would provide moderating influence towards the common good; and, third, that IFES distinctives and ethos embodied the corrective to nominal Christianity that I judged impotent in the face of misuse and sometimes abuse of power in the state and church.

What I did not, and could not at the time, do was interrogate the narratives that created those assumptions. I could not have perceived that the Christianity that was planted in Africa, whose midwives were the parachurch organisations from Europe and North America, bears the burden of the Western legacy, both in its social outlook and self-understanding.[7] My reading and study of Scripture was nurtured by Scripture Union in high school and the Christian Union at university, and my understanding of the gospel was shaped by Western thought-categories. Two years of theological studies, in a premier evangelical graduate school, did not help matters. I believed that the distinction between 'evangelical' and 'liberal' was essential to naming the value IFES movements brought to the churches; I believed that all that the African nation-states required to deliver the common good were men and women of integrity. Maybe, if I had taken to heart Adeyemo's cry, that it was "pathetic that a Church with over 100 years of existence in many parts of Africa is still searching for a theology it can call its own," I would have considered more deeply African worldviews as hermeneutical frameworks.

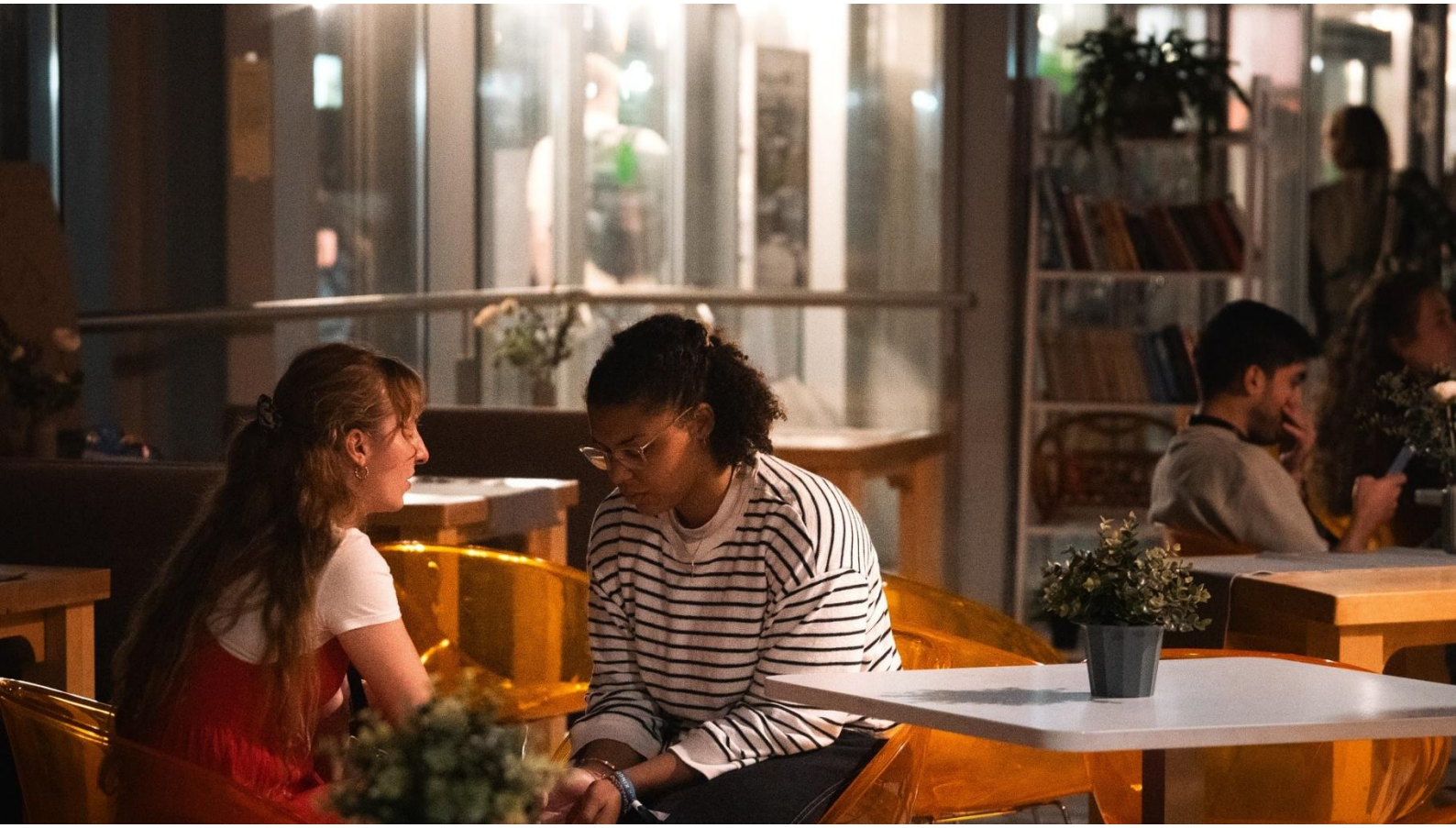
I have since learned the power of story in making sense of assumptions and visions, and how we live. Narratives constitute the substructure of our imagination and sense of who we are; they determine our sense of identity and reality; they name the reality we know and that which we hope for. And, like the roots that hold the stem, branches, flowers, and fruits of a tree, they are invisible. Reading some African theologians, who have grappled with these questions, has been a succour for my soul. I resonate with Emmanuel Katongole, that we must interrogate more deeply why Christianity and the churches were part of Africa's post-colonial malady.[8] I agree with Katongole that the hope lies in finding a "different story that assumes sacred value and dignity of Africa and Africans, and is able to shape practices and policies, or new forms of politics, that reflect this sacredness and dignity."[9]

Since the realities of chaos, poverty, violence, and tribalism are wired within the foundational imagination of modern Africa, a new future in Africa requires more than skills and technical adjustments to improve nation-state legitimacies and operations. It calls for new stories, a different foundational narrative or narratives that can give rise to new expectations and a new imaginative landscape within which a new future in Africa can take shape. This search for a new future in Africa, which is a search for a different starting point for politics in Africa, must become the subject of a fresh conversation in Christian social ethics.[10]

IFES national movements could make their contribution in this journey of searching for a fresh conversation on what the Gospel teaches about the common good and re-imagine the future of Gospel witness on the continent.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Zac served as the General Secretary for FOCUS Uganda, before becoming Regional Secretary for the EPSA region. He has also worked as the Regional Director for the Church Mission Society in Africa and as a bishop in the Church of Uganda. Since 2012, David has been working full-time for the causes of social justice and good governance in Uganda. He is the author of several books including *The Church: God's Pilgrim People.*



BOOK REVIEW

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL STUDENTS: HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND MISSIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A GLOBAL UNIVERSITY MINISTRY

TIMOTHÉE JOSET

CARLISLE, UK: LANGHAM, 2023

Reviewed by Jessica A. Udall, faculty member, Evangelical Theological College, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

In the previous decades of the modern world enamoured with innovation, there has hardly been time to go back and consider the roots of societal phenomena. Yet in today's climate of widespread disorientation and disequilibrium—both within and outside Christian circles—there seems to be a recent evangelical trend of historical investigation and inquiry in order to make sense of current realities. Timothée Joset's *The Priesthood of All Students* fits into this category. It not only provides insights into the origins and development of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) but also brings to light larger issues, controversies and challenges within the worldwide Christian church and globalizing society as a whole. Beginning with a broad overview of the history of IFES—a task which the author acknowledges as difficult to do because of the vastness and variety of the organization's worldwide presence—Joset sketches its birth and growth both chronologically and with regard to the development of its ideas about 'theology (the legitimation of IFES's mission); ecclesiology (the legitimation of the form of IFES's mission); and university (the context of IFES's mission)' (p. 5). He suggests that 'as Paul used the imperial Roman road system to spread his message, IFES uses the university system' (p. 153).

Joset's generous use of primary sources demonstrates his commitment to an unbiased presentation. Giving IFES's critics a prominent voice along with its proponents, he ultimately contends that a missional ecclesiology 'legitimise[s] a ministry on campus which is the contextual incarnation of the mission of the church and not anything *beside* it or potentially secondary to it' (p. 359).

Joset delves into the day-to-day activities of IFES as well as the 'theological, ecclesiological and missiological questions' (p. 169) which they necessarily raised and continue to raise. These activities include witness, prayer, Bible reading and fellowship, which Joset explains within the themes of immediacy, mediation and participation. These themes, Joset suggests, point to 'the implicit "priesthood of all believers" logic at work in IFES', which holds that 'because IFES students have a direct relationship to God (*immediacy*), they can be frontline witnesses (*mediators*) of Christ on their campuses … in the context of their membership of [and, thus, participation in] the IFES fellowship as well as in the church' (p. 181).

Whether in the initial formulation of IFES's Doctrinal Basis or the gradual articulation—informed by the questions and contributions of its growing constituency from all over the world—of IFES's missional ecclesiology, Joset argues that IFES operates with a presupposition of the priesthood of all believers. He then explores the biblical and theological background of this doctrine, intentionally including non-evangelical sources to claim that the doctrine has a 'growing ecumenical consensus' (p. 253). He also goes beyond the church/parachurch binary, instead demonstrating IFES's self-understanding as 'the natural, contextual outworking on campus of a *missional* understanding of the church' (p. 238) in which students serve a pilgrim-priestly role by participating in the mission of God on campus, since the New Testament 'witnesses a widening of the priestly prerogatives to the *whole* people of God' (p. 252).

Joset concludes by offering a way forward for IFES and the global body of Christ: the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers—with its attendant themes of immediate access to God and the mediatorial role between God and the academic and global world—can make possible more constructive conversations on matters such as indigeneity and contextualization.

Understanding campus ministry as part of the priestly function of all believers, says Joset, allows it to operate in an apostolic way that does not compete with but is in fact an integral part of the ministry of the local church in a community that contains a university. This conviction becomes the foundation for empowering student leaders to study and share the Word of God for themselves, while also encouraging them to learn from others, including the leaders of both the global church and the local churches in their communities. Doing so requires a wise navigation of tensions between 'the opposite pairs *church–parachurch, academically trained–untrained*, *experienced–inexperienced*, *ordained–lay*, and *young–old*' (pp. 357–58).

As the global church seeks to navigate similar tensions while experiencing a shift from the Global North to the Global South, Joset's work is timely in honestly depicting an organization that has struggled and succeeded in spreading across the globe, in a way that has involved reciprocal intercultural partnership and a mutual give-and-take of ideas and practices among its ethnically varied iterations. This book will be helpful to those involved in university ministry as well as those concerned about the perennial tension between church and parachurch organizations. Both Joset and IFES question those categories and propose instead that a 'community [like IFES] is not an alternative local church, but the manifestation of the invisible church on campus' (p. 217).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Udall lives in Ethiopia and teaches Intercultural Studies courses for Columbia International University (Columbia, SC) and Evangelical Theological College (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) as well as serving with SIL Ethiopia. She researches and writes on topics related to mutual intercultural learning, diaspora missiology, and what it means to be human in a world of machines.

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