

Response to the paper of Dr Paul Inglis: *Theological Education for the Future Church and the Future World*

Ray Overend

Dr Inglis' paper echoes the theme of a billboard you see as you begin to drive from Brisbane Airport towards the city. It says "Welcome to the Future". Paul has given us a superb picture of some of the features of a new church and a new world. He has stood up like signposts some of the dimensions of the Gospel that often never get raised from the page of God's Word.

As we look across the contemporary scene, we might well be reminded of the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Had Peter remained silent, the three future apostles just might have witnessed something momentous in the glory of God. But, like a postmodern journalist, Peter's impulse was to freeze the experience of the day into a human box, a religious icon. Under the impact of humanism we have certainly frozen the Bible's message into stylised theologies which seem sometimes to capture so little of the wonder of God himself.

If, in the hope of making fresh and poetic discoveries about beauty itself, you turn up a dictionary or an encyclopaedia under the term *flower*, you will be disappointed. A flower is usually defined simply as a *reproductive structure*. It is that of course. But you will find little to inspire you to poetry, such as the way the colour of flower and stem always harmonise, as do the colour of stem and leaf. The song that flowers sing to the whole of humanity is scarcely mentioned.

Indeed, since its inception, every edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica has contained an article on *inspiration*, yet the latest edition has none. The modern worship of the practical and pragmatic has led God to withdraw a further measure of his spiritual light from Western society. As with the ancient people of Babel, the result is fragmentation. The continual forming of new independent churches is a postmodern feature. Our theologies and philosophies have been saying more and more about less and less.

Dr Inglis is challenging us to anticipate a church that embraces the holism of the Gospel, and a world that finds in the church both a love and a theology that answer the search for meaning within the contemporary community. Only 'powerful theology', he says, can counter the increasing threats of economic rationalism, orchestrated as they are by international commerce.

Thus perhaps the most frightening reality to which we need to be awakened is that which Paul calls a *new age of grand management*. It has, he says, been brooding for a long time. 'Increasingly modern western cultures are failing to do what cultures are designed to do: to give our lives meaning - a sense of identity, belonging and purpose, both socially and spiritually - and to provide a sound framework of values to guide what we do.' To Dr Inglis' remarks here I would only add that the sovereignty of God should be acknowledged to be a more significant change agent than any signs from which we might seek to predict future trends.

However Dr Inglis is surely right that theology must go beyond a doctrine of future redemption and provide a full sense of purpose and direction for life on earth. He is also right that responsible theology must include a demand for stewardship of the earth. A theology that sells concession tickets to heaven and proclaims only doom and gloom for the earth may just miss an inner point to the Gospel.

Not long ago I found it a chilling experience to be invited into the midst of twenty Christian professionals in Honiara, Solomon Islands. Present was a medical specialist involved in malarial

research, with accompanying ethical questions of no small significance. Present also was the governor of the Reserve Bank. School teachers were present. The Secretary to the Prime Minister explained to me his purpose for setting up the fellowship of the evening. He drew a time line on a blackboard, summarising the curriculum of theological and local church teaching over the last 100 years within their denomination of (now) 500 churches. He said that there was nothing in that curriculum that helped him in his daily role as soundboard to the PM in major national and regional decisions. The libraries had nothing. And every person in the room made a similar complaint. I came back to Brisbane and immediately wrote a series of studies for Christian professionals in Melanesian society. The medical researcher, later visiting Brisbane as a Post-graduate Examiner for the School of Tropical Medicine, said to me: 'Ray, nobody has ever introduced us to those concepts before!' Sometimes our theology is educating people for yesterday, not explicitly for today, and hardly at all for tomorrow. What would we say of our library collections?

At this point a few practically minded librarians call out, 'Hang on! I do not have much say in the policy and direction of my library - Help!' I was asked to join the curriculum advisory committee of a Christian Arts faculty in Brisbane. Did they really want to hear a visiting outsider? I began my association with them by asking what was the new faculty to achieve - was there a philosophy of the humanities in place? I finished up writing one. If as a librarian you can present a philosophy of library, the sound of your voice might be very welcome. A faculty will not appreciate you or your needs until that faculty comes to see that a library is far more than a collection of resources. A library is the place where every subject meets. A library is one place where people move from knowledge to wisdom. A library is a place where life comes together.

Changing curriculum in theological institutions might sometimes be a hefty business. But libraries can make an immediate change in filling curriculum gaps. In fact from Open Book I bought for my Solomons' doctor friend a copy of the IVP *New dictionary of ethics and pastoral theology*, a book that would enlighten the world-view of any professional, and therefore a book for every theological library!

Sadly it is the Western church that has exported a myopic theology around the world. Not surprisingly, and despite our evangelistic fervour, the church of the West has been, as Dr Inglis notes, in significant decline, with members looking over the wall to other religions. And, quoting Bosch, Paul says that Western theology is suspect in many parts of the world. No wonder Paul says that the Australian church must take a fresh grip on theological vision. Surely he is right. Professional theology must broaden itself in such a way that it writes meaning into every dimension of life, not just the ecclesiastical and eschatological. 'The theological education industry is on the edge of a great new role in society', he says.

Also, how true it is that theology must grow outside of the institution; it must see itself as part of the dynamic of the church and the community, not as something purely institutional or professional. It is true also that theological education must actively plan a strategy! To be sure, the absence of proactive strategy represents regression. So, says Dr Inglis, we must not see the future as an 'empty space' (don't you like the expression?) but as something that may be anticipated and impacted. He talks in some detail of the development of *futures concepts and tools* for prediction. The people we teach should be encouraged to see themselves as involved in the dynamics of the future, and not just the moral dynamics. A theology with *outcomes* will counter the tendency of the church and the community to be 'responsive rather than forward thinking'. There is indeed, Paul says, a new dynamism out there, but it needs a future-oriented theology behind it. Equipped with an adequate theology, the church can answer 'the big questions' and give real hope to a confused world. Not only the church but, through the church, 'the citizens of the world need to be prepared for a world which will be significantly different from the world of the 1990's: a world characterised by severe environmental problems, rapid technological change, globalisation and expanding information networks.'

Seminaries and theological colleges come under criticism as much as universities and technical colleges when graduates ask "Why didn't they prepare me for this?" The answer - widespread interaction between clergy and laity and between church and world: this, says Paul, gives the stimulus that takes our theology beyond mere symbols.

The role of the pastor or priest will change, says Paul. Instead of being (amongst other things) a disseminator of doctrine and information, he or she will be more a catalyst in the process of theological discovery in the hearts and minds of the congregation. I might say here that this has in fact been happening recently on quite a wide scale in some evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal denominations.

The role of the librarian will sometimes have to expand radically to be also a part of this dynamic. The breadth of readership will radically change. The body of the church will need access to resources as never before. Certainly theology must not become simplistic; but there will be new books written to escape the unnecessarily stylised jargon of the traditional college.

The whole concept of the theological library will broaden. Holism will be vital. With Dr Inglis, I believe that application to every practical area of life will become vital - domestic, professional, scientific, technological, commercial, governmental, judicial etc. Might I suggest that theological libraries could precede curriculum change by introducing carefully selected secular books to widen the general education of theology students. How many theology students have a developed world-view? In my experience in visiting lecturing across a spectrum of colleges, I would say, very few. How do you write meaning into the lives of others if you have not caught the meaning of life yourself?

As a Senior Fellow in philosophy at Edinburgh University, I was searching for meaning. I didn't find it, at least not until I met a simple film-writer in Paris who radiated more of the purpose of life than any of us academics! Christianity is certainly not asceticism. It well and truly involves the human intellect. But I submit that we must allow the Spirit of God to enliven our whole concept of theological education!

The growth of a theological dynamic within the whole church body will be a departure from what Dr Inglis calls the 'trickle down' mode of teaching and learning that has been a feature of modern life. Ministry will take on a new vitality. The church family itself will become an agent for change in the community that an ecclesiastical structure standing on rationalistic theology could never match.

Dr Inglis says that Christianity has been accused of at least supporting the exploitation of the earth, the abuse of human rights and colonial domination. Through a new focus in theology, people can be encouraged to 'look afresh for a vision of creation and recreation that will affirm God as the source and sole measure of time and space and the sole author of life and hope, to whom we are accountable for our stewardship'. (Lamouris, quoted by Inglis: 10 above)

So, says Dr Inglis, theological teaching should be proactively anticipating the good changes that will come in the 21st century. We must be aware of the threats of economic rationalism, of a fragmented society and of unsustainable development. But we must not embrace negativity, says Dr Inglis. He seems to be saying that within community there is something innately good. Theological education must encourage the dynamic of community as distinct from a too strong emphasis upon tradition and structure. It must also emphasise the synthesis of theology with other studies such as history and sociology and the study of futures projections. In summary, theological education should be looked at in terms of its outcomes. Correctly conceived, it can make a unique contribution to the future of the church and the world together.

As a Christian philosopher may I now draw together what would be my own personal response to Paul's challenging paper?

It seems to me that one of the most valuable features of Dr Inglis' paper is its perception of the worldview in current theology, and in our way of teaching theology. But can we expand on his thoughts here? There is a remarkable book by Parker J. Palmer called *To know as we are known: education as a spiritual journey* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1993). Palmer is one of a number of educationists pointing out that truly perceptive learning only comes to those who are on a personal and individual road of discovery. Learning is an active participation in creativity. And, although most fundamentally an individual activity, learning may be richly enhanced by participation in community, especially where community contains teachers who know how to teach creatively and by participation. If this is true for learning in general, how much more true would it be for theological education? And this brings me to a second valuable feature that I see in Paul's paper - its anticipation of change of worldview in the contemporary church and in contemporary culture. His point here too however needs explanation.

Most importantly I thought that Paul might have made more of the spiritual renaissance occurring both in church and community. *Festival 96* with Franklin Graham was historic for Brisbane. Every major denomination from Catholic to Pentecostal was well represented by its leadership. In the leadership breakfasts and in the Festival itself one could sense the church breaking out of the humanism that had bound some denominations to a precious selfconsciousness and other denominations to cold tradition. Eyes looked up to God himself. Eyes looked out to the needs of the 'whole person' throughout the world. A new level of spirituality seemed to be being born, one that could build community amongst leadership, and one so genuine that it could write meaning into every dimension of life.

Sally Morgenthaler in her remarkable survey of American churches has also found a deep desire for a re-focus away from man and from market-driven evangelistic strategies to a focus upon the glory of God himself. In calling her book *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), the author is calling attention to the way church after church is, independently, entering a new level of spirituality in the knowledge of God himself and in the biblical meaning of true worship.

Parallel with what may well be the beginnings of a spiritual renaissance in the church, there is of course a spiritual awakening occurring in the Western world. Melbourne sociologist John Carroll, in his startling book, *Humanism: the Wreck of Western Culture* (Fontana, London, 1993) says that the time that Europe put man on the throne in place of God was the time from which Western civilisation began to decline. Carroll, who does not claim to be a Christian, is typical of an increasing number of academics reacting to modernism and postmodernism. World-recognised Adelaide physicist, Paul Davies, declares that science may give the 'how' to life, but, to explore the 'why', we must look to a dimension beyond the senses and beyond pure logic.

A *Zadok* publication (circulated amongst academic Christians) reports a credible survey of Australian High School students, revealing that eighty percent are now searching for a spiritual answer to life (Digby Hannah in *Zadok Perspectives*, no 51, Summer 1996). World Vision Australia's Winter 1996 edition of *Grid* says this: 'The number of Australians in mainline churches on Sunday is at an all time low but the number of Australians seeking spiritual reality is at an all time high. In essence this is the conclusion of the recently published report from the Christian Research Association.' (Philip Hughes et al (1995) *Believe it or not: Australian spirituality and the churches in the 90's*, Melbourne: Christian Research Association.)

In their 1995 book *Value Change in Global Perspective* (University of Michigan Press), authors Abramson and Inglehart record the results of research from seventy percent of the world's population - from China to England and from Mexico to Nigeria. The conclusion? That 'the gradual shift from materialist values (such as the desire for economic and physical security) to postmaterialist values (such as the desire for freedom, self-expression and the quality of life) is in all likelihood a global phenomenon.' So, while agreeing with all that Paul Inglis has said about a re-focus of theological education and its implications for libraries, I would want to ask whether the most significant emergent feature of both the church and the community is not a new yearning for spirituality. Is this the most fundamental thing that we should be investigating? After all, between the eighteenth century's rationalistic Enlightenment and the twentieth century's growing preoccupation with information stood the great romantic era represented by Tchaikovsky in music and by Benedetto Croce in philosophy. For Croce a work of art is not just the physical artefact but the (spiritual) 'expression' of an intuition.

One might ask, does the study of philosophers like Croce make any practical difference to us? Can I give a quick personal example? I had studied physics and loved playing with cameras. But I could not take one artistic photograph. Croce showed me that we don't 'take' a photograph; we 'make' it. Suddenly my pictures were judged to be works of art. Croce's writings were collectively called *Philosophy of Spirit*. All such people can contribute to a life-size theology that actually works! In *The authentic Jesus*, John Stott said:

Jesus Christ, as the logos of God and the light of men, is himself ceaselessly active in the world. Because he is 'the true light coming into the world and giving light to every man' (Jn 1:9), we dare to claim that all beauty, truth and goodness, wherever they are found among human beings, derive from him. This is an aspect of God's 'common grace', his love shown to all human kind; it is not, however, 'saving grace' which is given only to those who humbly cry to him for mercy.

I submit that, if we recognise Christ as the *logos* writing inspiration into every relational and creative and educational dimension of life, then it will be our fellowship with him, and our obedience to him, that brings us to what in John 8:32 he called *the truth* (Greek *aletheia*) that, he said, would set us free.

The emergent spirituality both in the church and the world may demand a new recognition of the inspiration of the *logos* in theology and in theological education. What would such a paradigm shift say for libraries? When the grounds of the University of Queensland were being landscaped back in the 1950s, a spacious, tree-lined area was set aside as *the philosopher's walk*. And, in the 1950s and 1960s, when you sat in the main library you didn't sit in an 'information cell'.

You sat comfortably at a large table, with a distant view and under a very high ceiling that, with the windows, also brought some daylight to your eyes. The interior of the building displayed the most beautiful marble. The whole setting perfectly modelled the beauty of the very creativity in which you were engaged in your studies of literature or history or philosophy. Because others were also sitting silently around large comfortable tables, you also had a sense of community.

For the comfort of some librarians I should add that the Spirit of God can work in theological libraries without the marble and without even daylight! But what we must have, I submit, is a true philosophy of library.

I suggest that, whilst sociological projections of the community's worldview and future are essential, as Dr Inglis so well argues, yet, paradoxically, the number of books studied by theology students might actually decrease. It was always the first rule of humanistic philosophy that the truth could not be found (Bertrand Russell told me that his whole philosophy was based on one mere assumption); under those circumstances, books must continually multiply. But if theological learning again embraces inspirational reflection, theology will suddenly become at once profound and simple.

Secondly it will suddenly become relevant to every dimension of life - because is not the *logos* the very author of all goodness, truth and beauty in the physical universe, in the moral universe, in the social universe, in the political universe and in the universe of scientific and technological development?

In other words, all of the perceptions with which Dr Inglis has challenged us are vital. And we have agreed that they have been largely overlooked in our theological and educational traditions. But yet in another sense they are the periphery to something more fundamental. It was significant that the Greeks searched for five hundred years for the bridge that might link the world of sight and sound to the world of universals and ultimate meaning - the spiritual world. They called that bridge the *logos*.

Just as the fisherman John wrote to them explaining that the *logos* was not a philosophical principle, exactly so does he write to us saying that the *logos* is not a sociological principle, but rather a living Divine Person - Christ Jesus himself.

But, on the sociological side, there is one important cultural projection that I would like to mention. To promote a stocktake of our lifestyle, Jeremy Rifkin (President of the Foundation on Economic Trends, in Washington, D.C.) has published a book with the deliberately provocative title *The end of work: the decline of the global labour force and the dawn of the post-market era*, (Tarcher-Putnam 1996). According to Rifkin, the computer revolution, in increasingly digitalising primary and secondary industry, technical education, research and commerce, will yet produce a lot of gifted people with a lot more spare time! Rifkin says that this may lead to a totally new chapter in civilisation, ushering in what he calls 'a rebirth of the human spirit' (p293).

How the church must speak prophetically at this time! The church has never faced a moment of greater challenge. Many secular thinkers and writers are recognising afresh that life will never find its true meaning just in science and technology. After all, what is the most fundamental question that the Christian must ask? I believe he and she must ask, *Why did God create me?* The biblical answer is plain. It is so profoundly simple that one does not even need to find either a library or a theologian to learn the answer. We were created in the image of God that we might fellowship with him. We were created in the image of God that we might be creative in fellowship with him.

And then we notice also that God is plurality in unity; so then the true image of God is plurality in unity in marriage, in the family and in the church (John 17:23). It is also plurality in unity in world society. God does not want every nation put in a bag, shaken up and rubbed together until they all look the same. Will an Italian ever sing *Greensleeves*? But the whimsical in British culture is as exciting as the spontaneous warmth in Italian culture. God simply wants plurality in unity.

Denominationally it is the same. Each of the Christian denominations is emphasising a different aspect of God's truth. If we have what Paul Inglis calls 'the big picture', we can handle this. The challenges of his paper are so valid.

I do not believe that in the 21st century - if under the sovereignty of God there is a 21st century - the world will be unpredictably new in the most important respects. It will be excitingly new in all sorts of creative ways. We hope indeed that there will be deliverance from some of the selfishness of commerce that Paul describes. We hope with Paul that there will be a revolution in the way we care for God's earth. And - to go beyond Paul's paper - the book stacks in our theological libraries might be shaped around coffee tables as at *Wordsmiths* at the University of Queensland at St Lucia. (One writer said that a certain coffee shop in Paris was 'not a coffee shop, but a worldview'.) But the really big things in life will not change.

And because there *is* a big picture as Jesus said, not even the Internet - even with Bill Gates' three hundred satellites buzzing the earth - will be a substitute for sitting amongst a few treasured books and seeing fresh facets in God's unchanging truth.

*Ray Overend
Special Ministries Co-ordinator
South Pacific Partners in Mission*

Binding has no Bounds **Saturday Afternoon with Fred Pohlmann**

Tony McCumstie

After our Saturday picnic lunch in the park, we headed off to Camp Mountain to visit Fred Pohlmann a master bookbinder. It was a pleasant journey through the hills just outside Brisbane. (Did I say "hills"? Some of the hills were so hilly that the driver had to use an additional brake to ensure the bus did not end up in a ravine else the number of theological librarians may well have been significantly diminished). We only got lost once, so all in all it was a pretty good journey.

Having arrived, we were met by Fred and his wife, Gundy, and they showed us some of the work they do. "They" consist of Fred, Gundy and their son who work in a studio attached to their mud-brick house nestled in the bush on top of a mountain ridge.

We began with the bread and butter stuff - the binding of serials for libraries. A few questions were asked which Fred fielded quite happily but then we moved on to more interesting things.

Fred gave us a fascinating display of the craftsmanship and care that go into the repair and restoration of books like the ones you have tucked away out of harm's way and are wondering what to do with. Fred explained that there are basically two ways of treating a badly deteriorated volume. The first is essentially a band-aid approach which repairs the book and makes it serviceable again. Relatively cheap. The second is restoration proper, which involves matching the binding material, matching the paper where necessary, more work, more craftsmanship, more care and more expense.

Then, Fred moved on to the piece de resistance - fine binding. Fred collects and binds limited editions for himself and binds limited editions for others. These bindings are works of art in themselves. Bound in a variety of leathers (e.g. emu, kangaroo and even cane toad) and intricately detailed, the bindings are intended to complement the works they encase. Fred briefly explained some of the centuries-old techniques he uses and some of the unique methods he himself has devised. Not content with creative binding, Fred also dabbles in creative storage with cunning little hand-made boxes custom-designed to store, preserve and present the books. The standard of Fred's work is such that it is displayed in world-class exhibitions.

Fred seemed very pleased to have an interested and enthusiastic audience and fielded our questions quite happily. Over afternoon tea, we were able to chat to the Pohlmanns individually about their work and lifestyle. I, for one, came away a little envious of their creative field of work in fine binding and the idyllic setting in which they both work and live.

*Tony McCumstie,
Library Manager
Corpus Christi College, Clayton Victoria*