

Bible College of Victoria

A Site insight

I first became aware of the Bible College of Victoria one hot February day in 1981. We had just moved into our home with two children. I was ill with my third pregnancy and feeling very homesick, as I had not wanted to leave Oregon and move to Melbourne with my Australian husband. As I lay there feeling sorry for myself I heard the strains of one of my favorite hymns come through my window. At first I felt this was a sign from God and then as my mind became more lucid I wondered why the used car lot owner was playing hymns and thought it very positive. (In America the only people with loudspeakers were used car lot owners.) Sometime later my husband informed me that there seemed to be a Bible College a short distance away. I then found out that they often housed conferences and that would have been the source of the hymn singing that hot day. That was my introduction to the place where 14 years later I was to commence my career as a theological librarian.

Bible Colleges were part of a movement that developed in the early part of the twentieth century to provide theological training for evangelical Christians. This was partly a result of the division in the Christian church with the modernist-fundamentalist movement. These institutions were sometimes denominational, sometimes nondenominational, often operating at a high school level and training men and women as evangelists, missionaries, religious teachers and pastors for the conservative Protestant evangelical churches. They were united in one theme, that mainstream Christianity had lost its roots and was no longer faithful to the gospel.

The Bible College of Victoria, originally called Melbourne Bible Institute, was part of this movement. It was started by a middle-aged Anglican clergyman with one student in 1920. Since then many thousands have gone through its doors and many of those have gone out to the mission fields.

There are now many different Bible Colleges, some of these are church based and some are not. They also have varying degrees of academic achievement as one of their goals. At BCV I see this as one of the ongoing tensions of the place. All of the faculty are highly trained with doctorates from reputable institutions, and like academics the world over they take pride in what they do and expect high standards of work from the students. They also know that often the best church workers once they leave college are the students who perhaps did not do so well academically. So how do we cater to a wide clientele? How does the college cater to both groups without lowering its standards?

Another tension is that which comes from community life. Until recently BCV has insisted that all single students live on campus. This has changed in recent years. The reason behind this was that many of them would be living in community on the mission field and they needed to learn how to live in community while still in the safety of their own culture. I had two years of living in community in the Alaskan bush and this has given me some insight to the struggles that they face. (I often tell them how lucky they are not being snowed in for nine months with each other, that really separates the sheep from the goats).

Students are expected to do duties on a weekly basis to help keep their fees down. Residentials are expected to do five hours a week and non-residentials 2.5 hours. They help with the meals and general

maintenance around the place. The library has the equivalent of about 20 hours of duties a week. Which is how we can manage with just one full time librarian.

The community aspect affects the faculty and staff as well as the students. We are expected to have a cell group and to attend chapels, prayer days and other college events. We are also the only Bible College in Australia (if not the world) that has an aviation program. In 1995 Mission Aviation Fellowship, in conjunction with the college, started a program to train pilots. They would also receive theological training. Many of these graduates have gone to work with missions that have aviation as one of their components. In 1999 a program to train flight engineers came into being. There are very few places that train flight engineers in the secular world. There is a world wide shortage of flight engineers. At present we have about 30 students in what is now called the Mission Aviation Course. This has certainly changed the tone of the campus with all these young men who aren't academically inclined studying here.

To make things even more interesting BCV now issues its own degrees. In the past it was associated with Australian College of Theology. We now have many students studying for the Master of Divinity as well as at doctoral levels. Like many other Australian colleges we have many Asian students. It all makes for a very interesting place to work.

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