THE ROLE OF PLURALISM IN THE FAITH FORMATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE, WITH A FOCUS ON IMMERSION EXPERIENCES.

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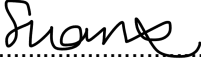
CONTENTS

SUMMARY

The intention of this thesis is to explore the relationship between pluralism and faith formation. Specifically, the thesis investigates how an understanding of religious pluralism in multiple contexts is gained and explored through immersion experiences. This is focused through the experience of young people, as this is both a critical time for their faith formation and they are also one of the largest demographics for engagement in short-term mission and immersion experiences.

The project is supported by a literature review and research which unpacks various definitions of pluralism, interfaith dialogue, the multi-faith context, mission, and how these relate to faith formation. The literature review unpacks threads in the research, focusing on definitions and understandings of pluralism, interfaith and multi-faith. It discusses controversies in the literature, with some attention to the critical reflections on pluralism and various emphases based on conversion. The research collected speaks highly to the importance of education and the need for a continued relationship between anthropology, missiology and theology. Through qualitative data collection in the form of interviews, further insight is gained into the role of pluralism in the faith formation of young people as experienced on mission. The data supports much of the research, confirming the impact immersion experiences have on the faith formation of young people.

This project offers insights and recommendations based on research and data for educational instruction and preparation. It focuses on the need for adequate preparation for interacting with other faiths and denominations, particularly in a missional context. Lastly, it affirms the positive impacts of mission for faith formation with specific connotations for young people.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed...

Date: 15th September 2019

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis project aims to answer the question, how does engaging with a pluralistic community within an immersion experience shape one's own faith? By doing so it explores the relationship between pluralism and faith formation, with a focus on young people. Pluralism is readily understood as making reference to religious pluralism in multi-faith contexts, such as Asian[1] nations. Pluralism has also been identified in relationship with secularism and the notion that secularism is now, as non-religion, a faith choice. This thesis will seek to explore the correlation between secularism and how the push towards acceptance, inclusivity and equality in all realms of contemporary secular society has aided the popularity of pluralism and the impacts of this on faith formation. Pluralism has traditionally been understood in foreign contexts, but is having an increasing impact on western contexts, including Australia. As such, this evolving impact in western contexts highlights the increasing importance and relevance of this research. This project does not seek to categorise pluralism as either a positive or negative force, but rather a resource to robust faith formation. It will also explore the role of pluralism in more traditional multi-faith contexts and its implications for interfaith dialogue. Discipleship and personal faith identity are heightened during an immersion experience; this thesis seeks to understand the impact of that relationship with a particular comment on pluralism. Through research and qualitative data, the project aims to support churches and Christian education in best equipping young people in engaging with other faiths and denominations while on an immersion experience.

Terminology

Before giving particulars on the thesis project, its aims and contents, some terminology needs to be clarified. While some definitions are provided within the context of a literature review and subsequent chapters, other definitions will be offered here.

The other

Referring to 'the other' could potentially raise unintentionally negative connotations or images in the mind of a reader. In the context of this study, 'the other' is referring to a person or persons different from oneself. In some of the contexts, this may be a person belonging to another religion, denomination, culture or community which differs from that of the participant in the engagement. As most of the study focuses on missional engagement, the participant is the one going while 'the other' is the one receiving. This is by no means a thorough or complete definition of how 'the other' has been interpreted, but it is being offered with full recognition that discussing 'the other' could be problematic.[2]

Mission, Immersion or Short-Term Mission

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[1] The specific connections between multi-faith contexts and Asian nations is explored in the Literature Review (Chapter 2).

[2] For some further insights into 'the other,' see; Wendy Farley, *Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World* (University Park, Pennsylvania State: University Press, 1996). Also; Michelle Fine, "Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994).

The terms 'mission' and 'immersion' seem to be used almost interchangeably. However, some note a distinction. The terminology used to reference the trip is usually dependent on the purpose of said experience. Mission tends to refer to more practical participation in the community, with specific aims of evangelism. Immersion can also do this, but immersion experiences tend to focus on observation or engagement with the purpose of learning about the culture or establishing a connection with the community. The project uses both terms in order to be inclusive and is not forming any intentional divide between the two for the purposes of this study. The qualitative data gathered for this project is based on short-term missional experiences. Many suggest that this is another, unique category, however "no consensus definition of *short* has emerged."[3] It is clear, however, that those on short-term missions do not want to be confused as tourists[4] and see as much value in their missional activity regardless of the duration.

Young People

This project defines 'young people' as persons between 16-25.[5] While data has been sought from within this classification, other data outside of these years has also been included. As this project focuses on young people's experience, with connections to the field of education, it has sought to include age ranges for upper secondary and tertiary students.

Reason for Project

Missional and immersion experiences provide great opportunities to practically apply understanding of one's faith and beliefs, but also to develop many aspects of religious understanding in a short and somewhat intense timeframe. The interest in this project arose based on personal experience, thus I deviate now to reflect on my experiences which formed the foundation for this thesis:

In all of my missional and immersion experiences, I have been enriched by the diversity of the cultures and people I have encountered. My worldview, understanding of people, culture, religion and faith was challenged and subsequently matured throughout these experiences. Hearing the Adnyamathanha dreaming stories of creation, which reflected those told in Genesis, while walking through the Flinders Rangers was my first taste of pluralism. I encountered it again, when talking about the parallels between Hinduism and Christianity with a Reverend in Southern India, as he shared his personal approach to and understanding of faith. In the Tiwi Islands whilst on an immersion trip with students, we heard about the rich history and traditions of the Tiwi Islanders and how they were embraced by Catholic missionaries. They shared a rich merging of creation stories and other beliefs, reflecting Catholic beliefs with their traditional customs and practices. These experiences and a new found understanding of pluralism deeply impacted my faith formation and I was encouraged to know I was not alone on that journey. It opened

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[3] Brian M. Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience* (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2012). p.47.

[4] Ibid. p.48

[5] There are many examples of sources who define "young people" as between 15 or 16 and 24, such as; Tom P. and Claes H De Vreese. Bakker, "Good News for the Future? Young People, Internet Use, and Political Participation," *Communication Research* 38, no. 4 (2011). or; Robert and Jo Boyden. Blum, "Understand the Lives of Youth in Low-Income Countries," *Nature* 554, no. 7693 (2018). However, most in educational or church contexts include 25-year-olds as "young people," such as; Jefferson and Young Huang, Charles, "The Ethical Lives of College Students in the Digital Age" (The Claremont Graduate University, 2010). and; Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience*. As these contexts are more relevant to my research, 25-year-olds are also considered "young people" for the purpose of this research.

the pathway for further conversations and research into multi-faith groups, pluralism and how differently Christianity could be expressed and understood.

Further research into pluralism and multi-faith dialogue has suggested a host of challenges and a variety of perspectives. There is much criticism around the nature of pluralism,[6] in relation to secularism and as it has been observed in other multi-faith contexts. This study seeks to suggest that pluralism can be a resource in faith formation and does not need to be categorised as anti-Christian.

Due to the correlation between young people and engagement in short-term mission, they were a natural focus for the project. The struggle of identity, understanding of self, including relgious beliefs and belonging is particularly poignant in young people. Young people are naturally prone to a personal inner quest at this time in their lives, which is integral to their faith formation.[7] Hence, impacts of interacting with other faiths, cultures and people, especially in the context of mission, has a more significant impact in this vulnerable stage of one's personal identity. As such, a stronger correlation between immersion experiences and faith formation can be investigated.

Another consideration for the research is the implications of these findings on educational institutions. Having been in the position of an educator preparing the experience, the role of educational training in the subject matter was of a key interest. How are educational settings which provide or equip students and young people for these missional experiences preparing them for the impact on their personal faith? Are these institutions providing education and training on engaging with other faiths and cultures, including interfaith dialogue, anthropological awareness and an understanding of pluralism? Are the trips themselves supported by enough preparation and debrief to answer questions of faith and theology as they arise? The thesis project aims to address these questions and provide suggestions to support education and training for young people in areas of pluralism, interfaith engagement and mission.

Methodology

Although personal experience and an ethnography inspired the thesis project, the thesis itself is research based. Where possible, sources referencing the current religious climate in Australia have been sought, but these are somewhat limited. Many of the references are based on a similar cultural climate, such as America or the United Kingdom.

Qualitative data was also used to support the aims of the thesis. Young people who had engaged in a missional experience as part of a particular denomination were targeted and interviewed. Interviewees ranged from participants in a College-based interdenominational immersion trip to those who had engaged in short-term mission overseas, predominantly in Asian nations. More details on the methodology can be found in Chapter 6: Data and Findings.

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[6] For examples into criticisms, particularly in an Australian context, see; Brendan Sweetman, *Religion: Key Concepts in Philosophy* (Cornwall: MPG Books Ltd, 2007).; Wayne Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought* (Victoria, Australia: Monash University Publishing, 2016).; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[7] For insights into the correlation between young adulthood and faith formation, with comment on this particular context, see; Douglas R. W. Norell, "Confirming Christian Confidels: Faith Formation in a Pluralistic World" (Hartford Seminary, 2008). p.25.

Summary

The introduction has framed the thesis as arising from personal experience and engagement with pluralism in multi-faith contexts and a greater awareness of pluralism within secular culture. It has suggested that the role and understanding of pluralism needs further investigation to recognize the implications for faith formation. The focus is on young people, due to the construction of their identity at this stage in life and thus the clear implications for faith formation. It has also explained aims of making connections regarding missional experiences to provide support in training and preparation for educational contexts.

Having established the purpose and intentions for the project, the thesis will move into a Literature Review (Chapter 2). The following three chapters will investigate key aspects of the research and their implications for the faith formation of young people, these are; Understanding Pluralism (Chapter 3), The Multi-Faith Context (Chapter 4) and Mission and Immersion Experiences: Encountering 'the other' and Ourselves (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 explores the qualitative data collected in Data and Findings: Faith Formation through Interfaith and Interdenominational Experiences. The final chapter offers a Conclusion to the thesis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature pertaining to pluralism and interfaith dialogue carries similar themes and concepts. Much of the research provides great detail and emphasis concerned with definitions and, as a result, non-definitions. Researchers focus on giving definitions and various approaches to pluralism, while also offering vague synonyms for 'interfaith dialogue,' which further points to the justification for the current research project to take us beyond definitions in our understanding. There is some thought as to the role of education, with minimal insights into Biblical references, faith formation and connection to mission.

Definitions of Pluralism

Although a strong concentration of research around pluralism is concerned with definitions, it mostly focuses on non-definitions, conflicting views and history. That is to say researchers are deeply concerned with clearly articulating what is *not* meant by pluralism, more than what definition or approach they are using.

In response to the works by John Hick (1922-2012), Sharada Sugirtharajah expresses some concern on the blurred lines separating 'theological' and 'philosophical' thinking of pluralism. She is not afraid to be cautious or critical, especially when it comes to the idea of 'world religion,'[8] commenting that pluralism is not about creating 'one' universal religion, rather it is a "faith seeking understanding" of other religions.[9] She also notes the domination of the Western perspective and the lopsided analysis of pluralism, especially in formal and academic settings. Sugirtharajah is not alone in pointing to another scholar to define, or create boundaries for what is meant by pluralism. For example, Fayette Veverka relies heavily on Diana Eck's definition and approach to pluralism, one that is neither fundamentalist nor relativist, asserting that "pluralism requires active engagement with differences, seeking genuine understanding, and not mere tolerance of the other."[10] Furthermore, she states the benefits of pursuing pluralism, for; "when pluralism is embraced as a value, dialogue becomes a 'truth-seeking encounter' between religiously committed participants who seek to 'find ways to be distinctively ourselves and yet be in relation to one another."[11] Veverka does offer some criticism of Eck's definition as one that does not recognise similarities across religions or internal differences.[12] She then delves into sociological understanding of communities and the meaning that gives to religious communities. As it can be seen above, these definitions are incomplete. The concept of pluralism can be viewed from a sociological, cultural, anthropological, philosophical or religious perspective. The literature most relevant is that which focuses on a religious perspective, but for that to be pertinent, cultural understandings of pluralism also need to be known.

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[8] Sharada Sugirtharajah, "Religious Pluralism - Some Issues," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Dr. Sharada Sugirtharajah (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2011)., p.5.

[9] Ibid. p.4.

[10] Fayette Breaux Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World," *Religious Eduction* 99, no. 1 (2004)., p.44.

[11] Diana Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston: Beacon, 1993)., p.191-9.

[12] Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World.", p.44.

Controversies in the literature surround the idea of conversion within pluralist cultures. Many present conversion as the aim, while conflictingly, others suggest the aim should be cooperation or competition,[13] not conversion. Although the concern of reaching all through the salvation of Christ is important for Christian theology, it is obviously not as central for other world religions. In response, some theologians argue for a "world religions theology,"[14] while others remain fixed that Christian truth is absolute truth and therefore must be concerned with conversion.

In *Which is it? Religious Pluralism or Global Theology?,* McCord's concluding remarks suggest that a Christian "metaphysical realist" can believe in Trinity, in Christ with two natures, without "forcing her religion down anyone else's throat."[15] McCord's article is a heavy-handed criticism of John Hick's unclear approach to pluralism and a philosophical ideal of reaching a shared, global understanding of religion. This has offered a different definition to pluralism than has been explored elsewhere. One that suggests pluralism is not about understanding 'the other' or by worshipping a new faith with old traditions. Rather, it concerns studying all the religions, then comparing and trying to build one shared understanding. Although Brockman in *The Gospel among Religions: Christian Ministry, Theology, and Spirituality in a Multifaith World,* comes to similar conclusions, his focus is more on providing a history of engagement with pluralism in the Christian faith. He suggests, "another result of the European encounter with religious others was the rise of the discourse of 'comparative religion' or 'history of religions'."[16] He in turn proposes that Christian approaches to other religions should be of a comparative nature, not necessarily one of conversion.

However, there are others who offer a much stronger stance on conversion and the need of Christian witness, such as Hans-Werner Gensichen in *Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions.* Gensichen ends his discussion by posing several questions on the subject, of which two are of particular interest. He asks, "Are we prepared to understand that conversion to Christianity is not necessarily conversion to Christ? Are we ready to believe that the mission and dialogue of Christ's church may entail serving non-Christian religions in love?"[17] Although he discusses positives and negatives of the various approaches, Gensichen is very strong on the need of keeping witness and conversion at the front of dialogue between Christians and non-Christian religions. It could be argued that Genischen is simply outdated, but there is more current literature which supports his conclusions.[18] Kaarianien goes on to look at other theologian's approaches to the question of salvation and finding Christ through pluralism in his 2015 article. Kaarianien's focus is on understanding the theological basis for pluralism in order to have an evangelistic and saving encounters with other religions. He offers two theological

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[13] Terry Muck and Francis S. Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. : Baker Academic, 2009). p.28.

[14] M. Thomas Thangaraj, "Teaching Theology in a Multifaith Context: A New Approach to Teaching Systematic Theology," in *Ministerial Formation in a Multifaith Milieu: Implications of Interfaith Dialogue for Theological Education*, ed. Sam Amirthan and S. Wesley Ariarajah (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986). p.29.

[15] Marilyn McCord Adams, "Which Is It? Religions Pluralism or Global Theology?," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Dr. Sharada Sugirtharajah (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2011)., p.44.

[16] David R. Brockman, "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions," in *The Gospel among Religions: Christian Ministry, Theology, and Spirituality in a Multifaith World*, ed. David R. Brockman and Ruben L. F. Habito (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010)., p.25.

[17] Hans-Werner Gensichen, "Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions," in *The Future of the Christian World Mission: Studies in Honor of R. Pierce Beaver*, ed. William J. Danker and Wi Jo Kang (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1971)., p.40.

[18] Such as; Anthony J. Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community," in *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak Lectures*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (MaryKnoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 2012). p.137.

perspectives,[19] commenting positively on them, before offering a critique. He then goes onto provide the Lutheran perspective, which is based on finding Jesus in the Cross. Finally, he provides a real-life example of interreligious dialogue which led to salvation. Kaarianien has a level of bias in his writing, as there are many theological approaches to pluralism, but he has clearly selected two which align nicely with his own Lutheran, inclusive beliefs. The discussion of conversion in this literature presents only a singular view when engaging with pluralism and does not entertain other approaches or intentions for interfaith dialogue.

The literature is consistent in providing and analysing different models as approaches to pluralism. "Keith Ward admits the usefulness of the threefold classification – exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism – which has become the standard template in the Christian discourse on religious pluralism."[20] Brockman uses this same model, but adds reference to "The Acceptance Model" in Paul Knitter's four models.[21] Brockman provides a summary of these as different approaches to engaging with other religions. Instead of concluding an approach to take, he suggests a "*provocation:* a challenge to continue the development of Christian theological reflection about religious others."[22] His understanding of pluralism and engaging with religious others ties in with the concept of interfaith dialogue. There is consistent crossover throughout the literature of concepts relating to pluralism and interreligious or interfaith dialogue, including the matter of conversion. A gap for the research to consider is the role of interfaith dialogue in Western contexts and how to engage with other faiths intentionally and authentically.

Defining Interfaith Dialogue

Along with attempts to define pluralism and identify the various approaches to it, the literature is heavily concerned with definitions of dialogue. Many are quick to highlight the "importance"[23] and "centrality"[24] of dialogue in engaging with other religions. Interfaith or multi-faith are terms used widely, but others are often used instead, such as; 'Interreligious,'[25] 'Interspirituality'[26] and 'Multiple Religious Belonging.'[27] Despite being synonyms, the literature devotes time and depth in justifying the creation of these new terms. King, for example, provides great detail in unpacking what she means or intends through her use of 'interspirituality.' King concludes that interspirituality is "more inclusive and neutral in its openness to a diversity of non-religious and

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[19] Jukka Kääriäinen, "Reign of God, Trinity, or Promise? Alternative Missiological Keys for Engaging Religious Pluralism," *Dialog* 54, no. 2 (2015).; The two approaches he discusses are Jacques Dupuis' "Inclusive Pluralism: Grace as nature fulfilled" and S. Mark Heim's "Salvations: The Gospel and Multiple Religious Ends."
[20] Keith Ward, "Pluralism Revisted," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Dr. Sharada Sugirtharajah (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2011)., p.7
[21] Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995)., p.34 in Brockman, "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions.", p.32.
[22] "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions.", p.34.
[23] Thangaraj, "Teaching Theology in a Multifaith Context: A New Approach to Teaching Systematic Theology.", p.33.
[24] Diana Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education," ibid., ed. Sam Amirtham and S. Wesley Ariarajah., p.53.
[25] Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community.", p.36.
[26] Ursula King, "Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Dr. Sharada Sugirtharajah (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2011)., p. 107-108.
[27] Robert J. Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious," in *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak Lectures*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (MaryKnoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 2012)., p.284.

secular beliefs, as well as religious ones,"[28] and notes that it is due to this she prefers the term "interspirituality" to 'interfaith spirituality.' King is essentially commenting on the importance of the *spiritual* in our interfaith dialogue and understanding of pluralism. She offers a balance of different theological and spiritual insights and writings, commenting on cautions, criticism and encouraging insights. She provides background and definitions for a variety of new terms she introduces, on behalf of others. Although King's insights on terminology are helpful, it does suggest a further problem, given that there are so many terms in use to mean more-or-less the same thing. Other theologians, such as Perry Schmidt-Leukel, alternatively provides a great starting point to defining religious pluralism and interreligious theology. He offers several other terms which have become either outdated or are still commonly used in theological works.[29] Schmidt-Leukel has demonstrated a large scope in his research and discussion of both the limitations and successes of interreligious theology which help shape an understanding of religious pluralism. However, through many sources either creating new terms or discrediting old ones, it leads to confusion, disparity and difficulty in determining what is meant by "interfaith." Determining any trend or literature on "interfaith" is made increasingly convoluted when one of many synonyms might be used in its place. The focus, therefore, is on the concept of dialogue, which has only been introduced into missional dialogue "comparatively recently."[30]

The literature supports that dialogue must be "personal,"[31] "authentic"[32] and "real world"[33] to have any meaning or impact. Many texts provide case studies and specific examples of dialogue to highlight its meaning, aims, impact and importance. Aside from these case studies, much of the research points to the examples of pluralism and interfaith dialogue in Asia. Asia's long history of accepting pluralism is founded on the "universal being affirmed,"[34] with "the reality of multi-religious societies"[35] being evident and that "interreligious dialogue is a natural norm"[36] in their communities. As well as other religious traditions predating Christianity meant that "mission as interreligious dialogue was embraced especially by missionaries working in Asia."[37] Although a great deal of the literature points to Asia as an example for interfaith dialogue and understanding pluralism, case studies have not been used extensively in this context. Much of the literature referencing the example of Asia were not supported by examples of qualitative data from missionaries or students who had engaged in interfaith dialogue in Asia.

The methodology employed by most sources were reflections on case studies within their own context. The case studies provided by Wingate, is one of the few from the United Kingdom. His focus was interfaith dialogue

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[28] King, "Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World.", p.117.
[29] Perry Schmidt-Luekel, "Religious Pluralism and the Need for Interreligious Theology," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World an Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Dr. Sharada Sugirtharajah (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011).
[30] Andrew Wingate, "Mission as Dialogue: A Contextual Study from Leicester, Uk," in *The Gospel among Religions: Christian Ministry, Theology, and Spirituality in a Multifaith World*, ed. David R. Brockman and Ruben L. F. Habito (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010)., p. 153.
[31] King, "Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World.", p.110.
[32] Wingate, "Mission as Dialogue: A Contextual Study from Leicester, Uk.", p.154.
[33] Kevin Derksen, "Churches Need to Be More Grateful for Change," *Canadian Mennonite* 14 (15) (2010)., p.25.
[34] Elizabeth G. Dominguez, "Implications of Interfaith Dialogue of the Teaching of Mission and Evangelism," in *Ministerial Formation in a Multifaith Milieu: Implications of Interfaith Dialogue for Theological Education*, ed. Sam Amirtham and S. Wesley Ariarajah (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986)., p. 84.
[35] Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education.", p. 51.
[36] Michael. Amaladoss, "Interreligious Dialogue: A View from Asia," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* no. 1, no. 19 (1995)., p.2.
[37] Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious.", p.282.

between communities of Christians, Muslims, Hindus and a "Family of Abraham Group."[38] Wingate is very direct in affirming the vital and necessary work of interfaith dialogue. His chapter is more a personal reflection on the experiences he has been involved in, with some advice for those attempting the same journey. Based on his cultural context, the interfaith dialogue is primarily between Christians and Muslims. He has also highlighted some of the experiences, challenges and concerns of engaging with interfaith dialogue with other faith groups. He has been sensitive and aware of the different perspectives and voices, with consideration to women, within this dialogue and how all need to be respected. His discussion is solely focused on establishing interfaith dialogue within your own community or cultural context and is, however, removed from the idea of mission or conversion.

There are several other case studies whereby the focus is on interfaith dialogue between the Abrahamic faiths. An interesting example was from one person's experience of trying to create interfaith dialogue and worship in Palestine. Yossi Halevi[39] discusses some successes, before extreme failure and difficulty due to the political situation. He does, however, conclude in hope. This is meant to set the tone for the entire discussion, even in this setting, in Palestine and the most difficult of places for interfaith dialogue, there is hope. There were several other examples of interfaith dialogue, including teaching about Judaism authentically in a Catholic school context,[40] with the aim of authenticity. Veverka's focus was on engaging with the other faith within their context and the educational implications to do this authentically. Veverka's study is clearly based on her own experiences and is very specific to Jewish-Catholic relationships. However, she does make worthwhile conclusions about the ability for pluralism to be positive in understanding 'the other' and better understanding one's own faith. She comments that this needs to be done by witnessing practices, such as sharing community life together in authentic ways. These are just two examples of a great many case studies on interfaith dialogue between the Abrahamic faiths. The majority of the research focuses on Northern America with several occurring in educational settings. The implications for interfaith dialogue in education is another aspect of the research which will be further investigated.

Implications for Education

Several examples of the literature involved in pluralism discuss the current shape of education on the subject. The literature suggests the need for improvement in regard to education and ministerial training relating to pluralism, interfaith dialogue and mission. Many sources suggested that concepts of interreligious dialogue were fairly new, and that not much scholarly work exists on short-term missions.[41] The sources which discuss the facilitation of education about pluralism varied in their approach, but all affirmed the importance and necessity of it. There was particular agreement on the need for it to be engaging and relational[42] in order to be relevant for young people[43] and also "essential to personal growth."[44] The sources varied on whether they were targeting students in a school, college or university context, but most were focused on young people or on education for ministry or mission purposes. Some of the most insightful sources on the subject were not

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[38] Wingate, "Mission as Dialogue: A Contextual Study from Leicester, Uk.", p. 162.
[39] Yossi Klein Halevi, "Epilogue: Crossing Boundaries and Finding Common Holy Ground," ibid.
[40] Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World.", p. 39.
[41] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience.* p.26.
[42] Derksen, "Churches Need to Be More Grateful for Change." p. 25.
[43] Don C. Richter, *Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World* (Nashville, USA: Upper Room Books, 2008).
[44] Patrick Tiernan, "The Paradox of Pluralism," *Momentum* 44, no. 3 (2013). p.16.

the most contemporary and despite suggestions that this is a relatively new concept, there was literature from the 1970s discussing the ongoing need for interfaith dialogue. Gensichen was discussing the impact of the secular on Christianity and non-Christians alike in strong, compelling terms and suggests that "the Christian world mission should (be concerned) if only because its own future may be at stake,"[45] in 1971; while also discussing the importance of interrelgious dialogue and understanding. Through his work, at least, it can be understood that there was awareness of pluralism, the impact on Christianity and the need for interfaith dialogue for at least the last fifty years.

There were several central threads in the literature which explored why there was a need for education on the subject, particularly in targeting young people. These concerned young people being able to understand their own faith,[46] the need to study world religions,[47] the context of a postmodern secular culture[48] and preparation for missional activity,[49] including being aware of one's own cultural view.[50] The concept of mission also heavily engaged with lacking educational resources and a need for a stronger background in anthropology.[51] Interestingly, most of these sources concentrated heavily on providing a historical background for engagement with other religions or missional activity, many citing Vatican II and acknowledging the "post Vatican II era"[52] when giving a detailed history of mission.[53] Although these sources are highlighting trends throughout history to make suggestions for current day, it does seem to offer a contradiction. These same sources comment that academia and missiology are declining[54] and that these topics need to be relevant and engaging while simultaneously deferring to longwinded historical summaries instead of providing practical and engaging experiences or examples. Schreiter, for example, poses more questions than he answers, giving thought and consideration to what is the role of mission and how issues of globalization and decreasing cultural borders changes this. He does not offer much in the way of practical suggestion, but is more focused on theory and the academic success and standing of missiology.

The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education was more reflective of needs of the students and creating course material that would be relevant and applicable to students once they found themselves in a different cultural context. Although it is a somewhat dated source (1986), Eck is clearly experienced as an educator and a student of other religions and interested in the dialogue and study of theology and pluralism in a comparative nature. She comments that elements of pluralism should be across the curriculum, such as when discussing ritual, you could discuss aspects of ritual in *many* religions, not just Christianity.[55] Angelyn Dries[56] alternatively unpacks the work and insights of three Catholic Missionaries and their impacts on the

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[45] Gensichen, "Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions." p.32.
[46] Brockman, "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions." p.25.
[47] Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education." p.50
[48] King, "Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World.", p.110.
[49] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience*. p.232.
[50] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.231.
[51] Angelyn Dries, "Mission and Culture: A Historical Theologian's Perspective on Twentieth-Century U.S. Catholic Mission," in *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak Lectures*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (MaryKnoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 2012). p.225.
[52] Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious." p.282.
[53] Richter, *Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World*. p.34.
[54] Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious." p.286.
[55] Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education."
[56] Dries, "Mission and Culture: A Historical Theologian's Perspective on Twentieth-Century U.S. Catholic Mission."

relationship between Science and Theology. Her discussion revolves around the advancing of anthropology and its importance in doing mission. She discusses that all three missionaries had "scientific" aims and methods, but all advanced ideas of mission and theology in some way. Her focus is very defined with little broad picture discussion. She is also narrowly looking at the Catholic missionary experience in the first half of the twentieth century, and is therefore looking back on what has influenced how we understand mission now. Unfortunately, she only provided a summary of this information with little insights or meaning for today's audience. Other sources relied upon very specific case studies or very focused qualitative research to build their discussion, with some indication of practical applications for other contexts.[57] Although some of these are applicable, such as suggesting values,[58] others are not necessarily easy to apply to all situations and contexts.

Concerns

Clearly there are some controversies, contradictions and concerns amongst the material on pluralism, interfaith dialogue and relevant concepts as they relate to mission and young people. Although, as mentioned, many of these sources relied heavily on detailed historical accounts or references to other theologians, they lacked Biblical grounding. Some of the literature was quick to point out that Christianity was formed in a pluralist culture[59] and it has, therefore, always been a part of the Christian tradition. There were a few who pointed to the scriptures for examples of interfaith or intercultural dialogue, such as Terry Muck and Francis S. Adeney who referenced the Parable of the Talents,[60] the Samaritan woman[61] and the example of Paul.[62] This signalling to the Bible was few and far between and even less commented on the example Christ offers of engaging with 'the other' even within a pluralist culture. There seemed to also be a large divide between the literature which was practical and that which was theological. The sources which provided detailed and insightful instruction on engaging in interfaith dialogue, on the role of faith formation or preparation for mission often did so with limited theological strength. These sources instead relied upon personal reflection, pre-prepared prayers and came across as somewhat weak in their content. The alternative is deeply theological, rigorous writing with no practical insights or conclusions, but work which raises question after question.

There also appears to be a clear gap in the methodological approach that most of the literature has undertaken. The sources either appear to reference scholars, theologians or missionaries who have gone before them or create very specific case studies which they have then written in response to. Most of these case studies are also within a Northern American culture, thus speaking specifically to this context and audience. Despite many sources acknowledging the importance of Asia when discussing pluralism, there is little qualitative data on engaging in interfaith dialogue or mission with Asia throughout this literature. The researchers themselves have mostly identified as either Catholic or Protestant (Evangelical) and despite many building relationships

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[57] Such as; Tiernan, "The Paradox of Pluralism."; Wingate, "Mission as Dialogue: A Contextual Study from Leicester, Uk."; Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World."

[58] Wingate, "Mission as Dialogue: A Contextual Study from Leicester, Uk." p.165.

[59] Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community." p.154.

[60] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.27; The Parable of the Talents can be found in Matthew 25:14-30

[61] John 4; Muck frames Jesus' ministry with the Samaritan woman as "non-judgemental and dialogical."

[62] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.47; Acts 17:16-34.

with other faiths, they do not appear to have much diversity or interdenominational sharing of resources or communication.

Conclusion

Based on the reviewed literature, it is important to identify and confirm what definitions will be used within this thesis. As there are a variety of definitions and terms used when referencing both pluralism and interfaith, a succinct understanding and confirmation of these is needed. The need for stronger education on the subject, with comments on secularisation and anthropology, have also been raised in the literature. It is important, therefore, to determine the impacts of both on one's understanding and engagement with pluralism and mission. It is also important to have a balance of theological discussion and ethnography, understanding the personal reflections and the researched analytical language on the subject. Due to the varying nature of the case studies presented, qualitative research will prove helpful in further unpacking these concepts. Data engaging with a variety of contexts, including Asia, would also be insightful.

3. UNDERSTANDING PLURALISM

Introduction

As discussed in the literature review, the connotations around pluralism are complex. The traditionally multi-faith understanding cannot simply be transferred to all contexts without further explanation. This chapter will focus on the meaning of pluralism in a globalised western context with specific implications for Christian communities. It will also reflect on the foundations of Christianity in pluralism and insights this can offer for the current condition. Although the focus of the research is predominately concerned with education in Christian contexts, it is important to address the role of the church in globalisation and faith formation. Globalisation and the rise of pluralism holds many inferences for the Christian church and its role in faith formation of young people, which will now be explored.

Forming a Definition

The literature review makes it quite apparent that many definitions for pluralism and certainly religious pluralism or "interfaith" are available. A quick request into any search engine will happily define pluralism for those who seek it. Although theologians, academics and scholars would desire to complicate this explanation, sometimes the simplest definition is best. Pluralism is about the acceptance and coexistence of one or more principles, groups or beliefs.[63] In terms of religious pluralism, it allows for Multiple Religious Belonging within a society to be acceptable. This may or may not look like one individual holding Multiple Religious Belonging or the more general acceptance of other faiths in a shared community. However, more than just a dictionary definition is needed to understand pluralism and the potential impact it has on young people and their faith formation. Whether we have the language to discern it or not, our postmodern society is becoming increasingly pluralistic. Due to globalisation and the rise of secularism, and certainly the rise of the individual, pluralism has also grown to be more accepted. Pluralism is not a foreign or new concept for Christianity or the Christian Church, but it is being framed differently. It is important to understand the nature of pluralism and religious pluralism in the context of globalisation and a society which is becoming increasingly secular.

The History of Pluralism and Christianity

To understand Christianity's relationship with pluralism, it is important to go back to the beginning. As the church and Christian educational settings are engaging with pluralism in our secular culture,[64] there is a need to provide grounding for students or those undertaking ministerial training in their own faith tradition.[65] As such, reflecting on how Christianity, in its origins and history, has engaged with pluralism should be a natural starting point. Muck begins by noting, "Christianity has always been in contact with the world's other religions… In one sense, Christianity has always existed in a religiously plural context."[66] Christianity was not formed in a religious vacuum, it has always existed, grown and spread amongst heavily religious contexts and cultures. At

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[63] "Lexico.Com," in *Lexico* (Online: Oxford).

[64] King, "Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World." p.110.

[65] Brockman, "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions." p.25.

[66] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century.* p.15

the origins of the Christian faith was Christ himself, who was a "mission innovator of the highest order. He showed how to bring a new message to an old religion."[67] His message was not just for the old religion, but for all, yet regardless it was formed in a pluralistic culture. Gittens explains then that "a degree of pluralism – diversity in unity, or unity with diversity- is both necessary and consistent with Jesus and early church practice."[68] Additionally, Muck points to Biblical teachings, in Acts[69] and the Gospel of John[70] for examples of evangelism in a religiously plural context[71] meanwhile Gittens notes that "pluralism is demanded, both because 'in my father's house there are many mansions'[72] and because human beings are formed in society, by culture, and are not uniform or generic."[73] Both use Biblical passages as examples for engaging with other faiths and cultures in a plurlistic culture respectfully. Muck goes on to note that "Christian love as described in the New Testament demands a powerful, unconditional love for the other,"[74] therefore suggesting a very firm and Christ-based foundation for engaging with other faiths. Therefore, when providing educational and ministerial training for engagement with pluralism, whether in a Western context or not, there needs to be solid reference to the Biblical foundations of engaging with love and respect. Although their Biblical references highlight respectful engagement in a religiously plural context and certainly highlight themes of evangelism, they are not overtly concerned with salvation. The concepts of conversion and salvation are always central whenever religious pluralism is being discussed,[75] confirming that "the problem of religious pluralism is fascinating, but complex."[76] The concern with conversion and salvation, however, is not the purpose here. Although the controversy regarding it as an issue in engaging with pluralism was noted in the literature review, it will not be explored further.

It is worth noting that Christianity began in a religiously plural context in order to enhance one's understanding of the future of Christianity in a very plural society. "Christianity began as the religion of a small minority existing in a predominately non-Christian society, and such it is becoming once more,"[77] therefore its origins may shed light on the future. Christianity began as "one religious community among many, jostling for space," before becoming the "official religion" and then returning to "one religion among many."[78] This return of being one religion among many is heightened by globalisation and a more universal understanding of the various religions of the world. Many Christians are prone to forget this origin and take for granted they grew up with Christianity being the norm, however, it is no longer. This needs to be at the forefront of educational thinking when

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[67] Ibid. p.210.
[68] Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community." p.154
[69] In Acts 17:16-34, Paul is shown dialoguing with the Athenians in their religious temples
[70] In John 4, Jesus' ministry with the Samaritan woman was very non-judgemental and dialogical.
[71] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.48
[72] John 14:2 (KJV) "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."
[73] Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community." p.154.
[74] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.27
[75] Sweetman, *Religion: Key Concepts in Philosophy*. p.142.
[76] Ibid. p.156.
[77] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1973). p19.
[78] Brockman, "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions." p.18.

engaging with young people, who have grown up being very much aware of the minority nature of Christianity in the West.

The nature of pluralism has created a rise in the notion of "spiritual but not religious,"[79] with this individualistic characteristic also impacting denominations within Christianity. Christianity has always "been internally divided, and it remains so. If anything, that division has increased."[80] As unbelief and belief jostle for space in our pluralistic world, they fragment each other,[81] they also impact the internal divisions of Christianity. There are now greater divisions between denominations and less inclination for cooperation. Compared to the pluralistic culture of Christianity's formation, "radical changes in the political, economic, and cultural configuration of the world's nations make interreligious interchanges today different in both quality and quantity… In most places today Christianity not only confronts the world's religions, but it also coexists with them."[82] Certainly Christianity has experienced periods of coexistence with other faiths before, but globalisation has created a growing culture of tolerance.

Being aware of the roots of any faith tradition, including our own, is important. However, there is necessity on being aware of the current climate, of being flexible to current societal demands and pressures. Faith needs to be adaptive and growing; not stagnant and in the past. Part of being adaptive is to be aware not only of the historical 'pluralistic context and formation' of Christianity, but also of the pluralistic culture we now exist in and the very nature of religion itself. As Veverka states, "religion in modernity has become a private, individual affair and a matter of choice, not obligation,"[83] meaning old ways of community and relating may no longer be relevant. To better understand how to engage with modern pluralism, an understanding of the nature of globalisation is needed.

The Influence of Globalisation

It is easy to observe or enter into other cultures and societies and recognise the coexistence or competition between different values, beliefs or religions which make them a pluralistic society. It is much more difficult to apply that same lens to our own ingrained culture. We do not always see our own worldview or the ideals or idols which compete for our attention. Globalisation for the West is one of these attitudes that we are naturally accustomed to and do not recognise it as contributing to a pluralistic society. The economic and cultural aspects of globalisation have contributed to secularization,[84] and it has also brought us into contact with different religious traditions.[85] This deeper awareness and understanding of other religions can be likened to a "free marketplace of religious ideas; we do missions in a nexus of competing evangelisms resulting in what we might call reflexive evangelism; and the mode of Christian interchanges with other religions is to both compete and cooperate with them."[86] In a globalised society much of life is about the "consumer," their needs, wants and demands with the aim of pleasing the consumer at all times. This same metaphor can now, very

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[79] Taylor, *A Secular Age.* p535.
[80] Linda. Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). p.56.
[81] Taylor, *A Secular Age.* p.531.
[82] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century.* p.15.
[83] Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World." p.42.
[84] Bruce Ladewitz, *Hallowed Secularism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). p.27.
[85] Ibid. p.29.
[86] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century.* p.16.

aptly, be applied to religion. As Muck argues, "religions have become commodities like any other, and religious people behave more like consumers than congregants. We buy a religion – and continue to purchase it – if it works for us. If it doesn't meet our expectations, we choose another religious or denominational product."[87] Unfortunately one does not have to look long or hard to recognise this to be true, as people often move quickly and easily between different denominations and faiths.[88] There are many reasons for this, but globalisation allows it to occur with greater ease. One reason may be that knowing more of other religions makes it "harder to believe that the one we grew up in happens to be the ultimately right one."[89] Another potential cause could be the "pressures of globalization, as people struggle in their own ways to overcome local differences or desperately seek out new avenues of divine assistance when human agency fails them,"[90] meaning - there appears to be so many options of the "divine" available, that if one fails, there is another to be tried and tested. As people look for solutions to the difficulties in life, "if Christian churches are not part of the answer, they will look elsewhere."[91] Muck agrees with this sentiment and suggests that even though globalisation has increased our secular culture people will still "look to their religions to be the meaning makers."[92] Although "consumers" are able to access, understand and choose any religion for themselves, the "globalization and freedom of religion have created a kind of negative tolerance of all religions that has the overall effect of minimizing them all."[93] The tolerance has meant that they are all acceptable, all right, all valid and all as easily ignored if one does so choose to do so.

Secularism as an Option in Religious Pluralism

One of the main impacts of globalisation has been the increase in secular culture. Secularisation has moved society to focus on the individual and, much like the consumer metaphor, his or her individual wants or needs are central to all decisions and lifestyle factors. The basis for the secular ideology is "that material means alone can advance mankind and that religious beliefs retard the growth of the human being."[94] Furthermore, the "widespread acceptance of the desirability of religious toleration"[95] is another signpost of secularism. The secularist position can be included in the discussion of religious pluralism, "particularly if the focus is on 'universal truth' or 'the path to happiness' instead of salvation."[96] The growth of secularisation now means that the "rise of no religion"[97] is no longer a new phenomenon, but it has increased at such a rate that "a substantial group of secular young people who never learned much about religion and do not feel they are lacking anything because of that. This group will continue to grow."[98] There are many reasons for the appeal in secularism as

[87] Ibid. p.17.
[88] Andrea. Dilley, "Change Wisely, Dude.," *Canadian Mennonite* 17, no. 16 (2013). p.35. This is also noted in the examples of participants in Chapter 6: Data and Findings.
[89] Ladewitz, *Hallowed Secularism*. p.30.
[90] Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious." p.285.
[91] Philip Gibbs, "Mission and Culture: The Svd Connection," ibid. p.296.
[92] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.17.
[93] Ibid. p.19.
[94] M.C. Setalvad, *Secularism: Patel Memorial Lectures* (India: Govt. of India Press, 1967).p.3.
[95] S.J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). p.37.
[96] Sweetman, *Religion: Key Concepts in Philosophy*. p.143.
[97] Taylor, *A Secular Age*. p.522.
[98] Ladewitz, *Hallowed Secularism*. p.12.

a pathway to happiness and choosing "no religion" over belonging to a particular faith group, which we will now explore.

According to Woodhead, modern liberal values are one of the biggest challenges for Christianity,[99] and it have contributed considerably to the rise of secularism. Secularism and religious pluralism "appeals to the "modern mind" as it values freedom, acceptance and inclusivity."[100] Another main cause for the rise of secularisation, is the desire in young people for greater spiritual depth and an "unprecedented rise of interest in spirituality."[101] "The route to spiritual depth has led the focus to be on the individual and his or her experience, spirituality must speak to experience,"[102] it is consumed with "improving the 'self'."[103] The focus on the spiritual is all about one's self, it is an individual need that can be met by the individual through whatever means they see fit. Consequently, there is no sense of relation or obligation to a faith community in order to have their spiritual needs attended to. Due to the individual nature of the spiritual, of the freedom of religion and the rise of the secular, there are a great many negative impacts not only for religious groups, but also contemporary society. The focus on the individual correlates with a rise in depression as it is associated with the "century of alienation."[104] In his discussion on the impacts of secularism, King suggests, "we can use the phenomenon of depression as an indicator of a spiritual loss, a loss of meaning or connectedness, and the attempt to use chemistry to alleviate it."[105] Although the rise of secularism does not mean the old religions will disappear, they "will still be present and viable to many. However, they will be secondary to the secular world, which will be normative."[106] Taylor agrees with this and notes that a major phenomenon of secularization is that an obvious "decline in belief and practice has occurred, and beyond this, that the unchallengeable status that belief enjoyed in earlier centuries has been lost."[107] As noted earlier, for Christianity this means returning once more to the position of a minority religion.

The Role of Pluralism and Faith Formation

Pluralism in a Western globalised and secular context has had a significant contribution to the faith formation of young people. One of the contributing factors to the rise of individuals choosing the secular over faith is a distrust of the church. Hudson notes that the "mild Christianity" in Australia has led to "disbelief often towards 'churchism' or clergy"[108] and as a result has led to a rise in disbelief, agnosticism, freethought, secularism and atheism.[109] Young people do not want to be involved in what they view as a church which does not support modern values and promotes a leadership or clergy which, due to the example of a few, appears corrupt and hypocritical.[110] As a result, for many, the lines between unbelief and disbelief were often ambiguous and

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[99] Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*. p.90.
[100] Sweetman, *Religion: Key Concepts in Philosophy*. p.150.
[101] King, "Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World." p.108.
[102] Taylor, *A Secular Age*. p.508.
[103] Ibid. p. 508.
[104] Mike King, *Secularism: The Hidden Origins of Disbelief* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2007). p.93.
[105] Ibid. p.97.
[106] Ladewitz, *Hallowed Secularism*. p.22.
[107] Taylor, *A Secular Age*. p.530.
[108] Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought*. p.3.
[109] Ibid. p.4.
[110] Unfortunately one does not need to look far to see evidence of this. The case against Cardinal George Pell is one such recent example: Livia Albeck-Ripka, "George Pell Sex Abuse Conviction Unsealed in Australia," *New York Times* 2019. p.7.

disbelief could go with new beliefs.[111] Veverka makes a similar observation, noting that "our contemporary context largely insures that religious commitments are "ambiguous" and "adaptive."[112] Meaning, even if young people do belong to a church community there are no roots to their faith and their commitments are shallow, resulting in their attentions being easily swayed elsewhere.

One of the causes for the precarious nature of faith formation in a contemporary context is possibly a lack of education or understanding of one's own faith tradition. It is important for young people to see themselves in a wider global context and that "knowing 'the other' is important, and part of the responsibility of ministry in a world in which we Christians are not alone. Equally important is our radical need for the other, so that we may come to see ourselves more clearly."[113] Through engaging in relationship with other faith traditions, including secularism, the church is better able to support young people understanding themselves and others. There is a sense that understanding another faith, another way of looking at the world, helps to better understand our own views. "Every religious man should study other religions in order to understand his own,"[114] this includes studying one's cultural context and being aware that many are choosing secularism as a path to happiness and as their ultimate truth. Christianity needs to be wary of establishing boundaries, where it begins and ends in relation to other religions,[115] including secularism. One of the issues suggesting the need for boundaries is that "globalisation, freedom of religion and negative tolerance of religious ideas… means that religion also becomes globalised and… religions now *look* more alike."[116] Young people need to be able to identify where it ends and how it differs from their cultural or globalised views. "Christian theology needs to have a more fluid sense of 'inside' and 'outside,' in order… to maintain a creative tension between Christian and non-Christian,"[117] to assist young people in their decision making and understanding of the different religious traditions.

Another key issue in the role of pluralism and the faith formation of young people is the need for freedom of religion. Muck explains this succinctly as, "better understanding of human nature comes from recognizing that true religion prospers only when it is freely chosen by individual human beings and the communities they form. This forces us to be content when people make religious choices of which we do not approve."[118] This is a struggle for many Christian communities. How do we support young people to feel equipped, enabled and supported to make their own choices regarding faith? How are they encouraged whether they choose a different denomination of Christianity from their upbringing, whether they choose secularism or another religious tradition? We can hold faith that "Jesus' message can speak to any human being in any time or place.

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[111] Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought*. p.21.

[112] Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World." p.42.

[113] Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education." p.55.

[114] J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997). p.84.

[115] Brockman, "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions." p.36.

[116] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.17.

[117] James L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1999). p.170-171.

[118] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.21.

It calls for a personal change of heart,"[119] which is certainly true of any Christian believer. However, this cannot be the only message young people receive.

Summary

The Christian church began as a minority and is finding itself returning to one once more. Although it has always existed in a plural context, one faith among many, the nature of pluralism and the various competing religious options now differ due to globalisation. We need to be acutely aware that young people are growing up in an ingrained pluralist and secular culture. Whether or not they are able to identify secularism as an alternate option to faith, as a contributor to pluralism, does not mean it is not a choice they are making. Young people are seeking fulfilment and spiritual experience, with pluralism proving a buffet from which they can make their selection. The challenge for the church is to (a) address the answers young people are seeking, including answers to the "difficult" questions raised by liberal values and (b) present an alternative which will give them an authentic spiritual experience; void of the negative, doctrinal, violent or outdated view of the church they have. Young people need to have a firm understanding of their faith, making education and experience an important part of the faith formation process.

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[119] Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*. p.9.

4. THE MULTI-FAITH CONTEXT

Introduction

The meaning of pluralism can be applied to our globalised, secular, Western culture, but it certainly did not originate there. Pluralism is most often expressed and understood in multi-faith communities. It is through an exposure to such communities that missionaries, students and young people first encounter an expression of pluralism which they are then able to identify in their own context upon returning home. The existence of multi-faith nations and communities is a growing reality and it is important to be aware of how to engage with these communities authentically. Authentic interfaith dialogue is crucial for effective engagement with multi-faith communities, as is an adequate understanding of their cultural and religious identities. For many young people, such engagement will directly impact their own faith formation.

Why Multi-Faith Dialogue?

The reality of globalisation has meant that we are now more aware than ever of the various religions and expressions of those religions which exist and are practised around the globe. Christians cannot put their head in the sand and pretend these religions do not exist. We also cannot treat them with contempt, but rather should engage in interfaith dialogue; "being interaction with different faith groups, such as Muslim and Hindu."[120] The education of world religions and interfaith dialogue are "central, just as the question of the theology of the poor and gospel of liberation are central."[121] There needs to be a greater awareness and move towards engagement and understanding of what we are able to learn from each other; "we must not overlook the real differences between ourselves and other people: the paradox is not to be resolved but engaged."[122] We should not enter into conversations with other faiths to create boxes or boundaries, but build relationships. We need to ask, "can the Church nurture meaningful and authentic Christian faith that also promotes coexistence with people of other faiths?"[123] This should be one of the key aims for the Christian educational context. In his contextual case studies Andrew Wingate facilitated many examples of interfaith dialogue and urges that "'dialogue' is not something 'wishy-washy' and vague, nor a betrayal of the Christian faith. Rather it is an adventure full of vigour, where Christian faith can be affirmed as well as much learnt from other faiths. Moreover, it is vital for the future of our increasingly multi-religious continent."[124] Although he is very much speaking into his own context and experience, his conclusions can be applied to other expressions of interfaith dialogue. He speaks to many of the critiques of interfaith dialogue in its affirmation of the Christian faith and while he comments on many difficulties he asserts, "if people from two faiths have met for a time, and learnt from each other, then that is an achievement, and there may be a ripple effect of which we may never know the extent."[125] It is with this lens that authentic dialogue and impacts on faith formation will be reviewed.

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[120] Biljana; Zahanet Ristoska and Pablo Payet. Popovska, "The Role of Interreligious and Interfaith Dialogue in the Post-Secular World," *Acadmicus - International Scientific Journal*, no. 16 (2017). p.38.

[121] Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education." p.53.

[122] Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community." p.170.

[123] Norell, "Confirming Christian Confidels: Faith Formation in a Pluralistic World." p.1.

[124] Wingate, "Mission as Dialogue: A Contextual Study from Leicester, Uk." p.154.

[125] Ibid. p.155.

The Need for Authenticity

Engaging in interfaith dialogue needs to be authentic and intentional. Although we can take part in interfaith dialogue while on mission, in a new or different cultural context, it can also occur in our own communities. Regardless of where one lives or worships, there are other religions meeting in Temples, or Halls or Synagogues not far away. Interfaith dialogue is not reserved for mission. Christian educational contexts can engage in interfaith dialogue in their own communities and provide opportunities to equip and support students to do this with their own neighbours. Although the prospect of interfaith dialogue may seem new, we can learn from the theological leadership of Asia who have "far more day-to-day experiences with the reality of multi-religious societies than most of their Western counterparts."[126] We are living in multi-faith communities whether we are aware of it or not and much can be gained from entering into dialogue with other faiths. The intentional experience of interfaith dialogue between believers who are "immersed in a new venture, they are exploring a 'spirituality across borders', thereby discovering new paths by deep personal engagement with their own faith and that of others."[127] King unpacks this further by noting the importance of authentic and meaningful interactions;

> "But spiritual growth and renewal happen when people of different faiths encounter each other and reflect together on the spiritual meaning of their beliefs and practices, and even more when they come together in interfaith worship, prayer and meditation, meet in retreats, or share in-depth some of the most personal experiences and struggles of their lives."[128]

It is not from a theological or academic perspective that insight and understanding are gained, but through spiritual and ritual experience in authentic practice with other faiths. Our interfaith dialogue needs to involve "head, hands and heart,"[129] meaning there needs to be action, genuine love and knowledge, not just one point of the triangle. This is not discounting the importance of theology or academic understandings of other faiths, this is also necessary. However, authentic insight comes from personal exposure to authentic practice, this can subsequently inform one's understanding of theology based on their experience. Further academic training can shed deeper insight into these experiences, supporting that faith formation is shaped by not only spiritual and ritual practice, but also theological beliefs.

Along with being authentic, dialogue is also most meaningful when it is informal and intentional. "All kinds of interfaith conversations happen in an entirely informal context…. these are the most natural of experiences, and can quite transform attitudes;"[130] it is in these conversations that we are able to focus on what communalities we share, rather than focusing on our differences. Wingate notes one example between a Christian woman and her Muslim neighbour who realized, "there is much more in common between religious persons from different faiths, than there is between a Christian and a person of no faith, even if of the same culture."[131] Although their faiths may have differed, they found similarities in their values, attitudes and lifestyle that they did not share with people of the same culture. Authentic dialogue "requires active engagement with differences, seeking genuine understanding, not mere tolerance of the other."[132] However, before we engage

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[126] Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education." p.51.
[127] King, "Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World." p. 110.
[128] Ibid. p.110.
[129] Ibid. p.112.
[130] Wingate, "Mission as Dialogue: A Contextual Study from Leicester, Uk." p.154.
[131] Ibid. p.154.
[132] Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World." p. 44.

in interfaith dialogue, we need to have a firm foundation in our own faith. As Norell argues, "for Christians… I suggest that the most faithful standpoint for interfaith dialogue is not relativism, but deep commitment to Jesus Christ."[133] We also need to be educated about other faiths, as "meaningful engagement with other faiths first requires understanding about them,"[134] fulfilling the "head" requirement, as "interfaith education is integral to interfaith dialogue and ministry in a multi-faith world."[135] Moreover, for dialogue to be genuine, "the quality of *empathy* is fundamental"[136] and "listening needs to be total… that listening needs to cover whatever the other person presents."[137] It is only through an authentic approach to interfaith dialogue, one which allows for practical engagement, deep listening, compassionate investment, and based on education about other faiths that it can be successful for all involved parties.

The Issue of Multiple Religious Belonging

One of the key concerns when discussing pluralism, interfaith dialogue or the reality of a multi-faith context is that of Multiple Religious Belonging. Multiple Faith or Religious Belonging refers to "practicing and adhering in some measure to more than one form of religious faith,"[138] which "has been a problematic concept among the Abrahamic faiths."[139] Christianity, as one of "the Abrahamic faiths have traditionally insisted on an either/or relationship among religions… in other parts of the world, however, this exclusivism does not obtain."[140] It is important to be aware of this worldview, particularly for Christians who may respond to Multiple Religious Belonging with fierce judgement. Due to globalisation, Multiple Religious Belonging is no longer a foreign concept in the West and "the number of people who find a spiritual home in more than one faith is slowly but steadily growing."[141]

There are several reasons for Multiple Religious Belonging, including a form of rebellion when "Christianity was forced upon a population;"[142] dealing with phenomena such as "rites of healing and caring for the dead;"[143] or some cultures where "religions are not experienced as exclusive of one another."[144] There are many customs of Multiple Religious Belonging where the expressions of faith and therefore the object of worship have merged, which conflicts a central command of the Judaeo-Christian tradition,[145] but this is not the only form. There are other instances where "the boundaries of cultures and religions have become more porous, believers find and develop configurations. They participate in one another's practices, sometimes investing them with meaning of their own."[146] For example, "there are groups of Christians in West Africa (in Ghana) whose fast during Lent closely resembles the practices of Ramadan."[147] This form of Multiple Religious

[133] Norell, "Confirming Christian Confidels: Faith Formation in a Pluralistic World." p.29.
[134] Ibid. p. 26.
[135] Ibid. p.26.
[136] Wingate, "Mission as Dialogue: A Contextual Study from Leicester, Uk." p.165.
[137] Ibid. p.165.
[138] Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious." p.284.
[139] Ibid. p.284.
[140] Brockman, "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions." p. 35.
[141] King, "Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World." p.110.
[142] Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious." p.284.
[143] Ibid. p.285.
[144] Ibid. p.285.
[145] Exodus 20:3-4; "you shall have no other gods before me. ⁴You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is on the earth or beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." (NRSV)
[146] Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious." p.285.
[147] Ibid. p.285.

Belonging is commonly found in Indigenous or Tribal expressions of Christianity. Christians need to be aware of Multiple Religious Belonging and like any interfaith dialogue, approach it with the genuine desire to know more of the other faith and their practices, rather with the forethought of judgement and conversion.

The Role of Multi-Faith Context and Faith Formation

Through interfaith dialogue and active participation with multi-faith communities, there is a natural influence on one's faith formation. For effective engagement with multi-faith communities, it is important to be present in the communities where and how these faiths are lived out, as they cannot be removed or isolated from their culture. "Cultural conventions and meanings are the *only* medium through which to express faith,"[148] and therefore the best way to witness and interact with them. It is through a "participation in the practices – ritual, aesthetic, ethical – that define the community as a way of life"[149] and through our deep involvement with these that "participants came to understand and appropriate their own religious tradition more deeply and critically."[150] We also need to be aware that in this engagement we "understand what you must hold at bay if you are to encounter another religion and culture with openness."[151] This openness is vital for there to be depth in understanding not only the other, but also ourselves. Veverka reflects that "when I am in the presence of a religious other engaged in practicing their faith, I am compelled to see the other through their own eyes, not filtered through my own tradition's interpretive lens."[152] Which, one can assume, is her hope for others in their exploration of pluralism and better understanding the practices of other religions. She goes on to conclude, "I am also compelled to see my own tradition differently as I see myself through the eyes of the other."[153] This is a common occurrence when engaging with other faiths and a clear link to the impact on the faith formation of the participant. Therefore through engaging with other faiths, whether in interfaith dialogue or the multi-faith context, one's own faith is intrinsically impacted. Christian educational contexts need to be aware of this inherent impact and also how to create environments where interactions with other faiths occur authentically.

When considering the multi-faith context and Multiple Religious Belonging it is important to be clear of our perspective and intentions. For example, "if we understand our own tradition as the sole bearer of truth while all others are in error, there is little purpose in dialogue other than to convert the other to one's own point of view."[154] Although there is some truth to this statement, there is much that can be gained from interfaith dialogue that does not need to focus on conversion. In response, Veverka suggests, "is it possible to foster commitment to our own particular faith traditions without demonizing, absorbing, or relativizing the other?"[155] Which should be, at least, one of the questions we ask ourselves as well. Brockman suggests two further questions we should be asking;

1. "What is God saying and doing in and through religious others?

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[148] Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community." p.158.
[149] Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, Willia M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkley: University of California, 1985). p.154.
[150] Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World." p.39.
[151] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century.* p.248.
[152] Veverka, "Practicing Faith: Negotiating Identity and Difference in a Religiously Pluralistic World." p. 54.
[153] Ibid. p.54.
[154] Ibid. p.43-44.
[155] Ibid. p.44.

2. What do religious others tell us Christians about ourselves, the God to whom we witness, and our relationship with that God, with human others, and with other beings?"[156]

These questions are vital in understanding other faiths, but also how we view our own and where we sit within our understanding of both.

Summary

Authentic interfaith dialogue is not just a current trend, but an important aspect of Christianity's engagement with the multi-faith world we find ourselves in. Pluralism exists not only in the globalised West, but has much greater history in other corners of the world, where multi-faith communities and interfaith dialogue have long been occurring. Through participating in this interfaith dialogue Christians are able to grasp a richer understanding of other faiths and in turn, more of their own faith is revealed. Interfaith dialogue does not need to occur exclusively on mission, but should always include genuine participation in the multi-faith context. Ministerial training and Christian Educational contexts should be looking for opportunities to engage in interfaith dialogue not only overseas, but also in their own context, ensuring that they provide adequate preparation and education for said encounters. Education about other faiths is an important prerequisite to interfaith dialogue which should not be overlooked, as is awareness of the different views and adaptions of Multiple Religious Belonging. Through deeper awareness, understanding and engagement with other faiths in their multi-faith contexts, participants, including Christians, are better able to understand, articulate and appreciate their own faith.

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[156] Brockman, "Introduction: Thinking Theologically About Religious Others: Christian Theologies of Religions." p.36.

5. MISSION AND IMMERSION EXPERIENCES: ENCOUNTERING 'THE OTHER' AND OURSELVES.

Introduction

Mission and Immersion experiences allow for personal, interactive, authentic and meaningful encounters with other cultures and religions in their context. These experiences, whether the focus is missional or immersive, short or long term, can prove life-changing for the participants as well as those they meet. As mentioned in the introduction, 'mission' may refer to more practical levels of service and evangelism within a community. It is not to say an 'immersion' does not, but the language used around immersion focuses more on observation and engagement with the purpose of learning about the culture. For many churches or groups, an immersion might be the first step in engaging with a community before later choosing to send mission trips. Ethnographical and qualitative data heavily suggests that these experiences have a significant impact on the faith formation for participants, especially young people. However, there is still work to be done for Christian Educational Settings and Churches in refining their impact, including preparation on encountering other cultures, worldviews and forming a greater anthropological understanding.

Why We Go On Mission

Aside from any individual or personal meaning and satisfaction one might gain, there are many theological and missiological reasons for engaging in a mission or immersion trip. These do not need to exist purely with the concept of going to a developing country, but the local church is also tasked with mission in it's own context.[157] Gittens explains, "Christian discipleship and Christian mission are needed in order to sustain a church community in communion with other communities. Otherwise, the church in some of its local incarnations will die, as indeed it has, throughout two thousand years."[158] Signing up for a mission trip means much more than a tourist vacation[159] with the added side bonus of some personal insight or a renewed sense of gratitude or appreciation for one's life. It is about alignment with God's purposes. The purpose of mission is God's purpose, it can only be done with the attitude and "commitment to understanding and loving others better." [160] Furthermore, "others" may refer to one's neighbours or those living on the other side of the world, but we are tasked to share God's *love* with them. The church is servant to this purpose,[161] with mission being God's purpose and the desired outcome not conversion, but service, good works, faith and inclusion.[162] Mission is not separate from theology and many who have reflected on their experience note it has "resonated or reinforced central theological commitments of Christian unity and the importance of service or sacrifice."[163] Through an active participation in God's purposes to spread *His* love, participants find greater understanding of God's intentions and blessing. Richter points out many Biblical references of God blessing followers, such

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[157] This is made clear in Acts 1:8; "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

[158] Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community." p.169.

[159] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience.* p.48.

[160] Gittins, "The Universal in the Local: Power, Piety, and Paradox in the Formation of Missionary Community." p.166.

[161] Ibid. p.166.

[162] Ibid. p.166.

[163] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience.* p.22.

as Abraham and Sarah,[164] when they answer the call or are sent and concludes, "when God sends us forth to serve in mission in our day and time, God lays hands on us and blesses us on our way."[165] In his reference to blessing, Richter makes it clear that "a blessing, like grace, is a gift to receive, not a reward to be earned,"[166] reaffirming that those on mission are not blessed based on merit. Although the intentions behind the mission may vary, it should be entered into knowing we are participating in God's mission, while also being prepared for potential impacts on our own faith formation.

The Impact of Mission on Faith Formation

Mission or immersion experiences, even in the short term, are highly impactful. From being away from one's own context, to engaging with another culture and being immersed within community, these experiences leave a visible impression on participant's faith formation. This is especially true for youth and young adults, many of whom attend mission as their first experience of interstate or overseas travel. Outcomes of survey data showed "young people value these outreach ventures (mission trip or service projects) as highly significant for their faith formation. Attuned to this, some youth leaders now make short-term mission trips the centerpiece of their youth ministry."[167] Richter goes onto explain, "mission trips play a significant role in the Christian formation of young people and adults. Such immersion experiences, typically outside the group's comfort zone, challenge participants to forge Christian community in ministry with others."[168] Many upon their return home comment on the "life-changing"[169] nature of the experience, offering reflections on the "personal spiritual and emotional growth, and often related through one or two significant relationships, divine relations or meaningful encounters."[170] The various reflections note "realizations of unity across cultures, gratitude for a relatively affluent life and self-discovery punctuate a week or ten days of manual labor, sacrifice and service in an unfamiliar cultural context." [171] Through the various structures and experiences, participants find their worldview, theology and values are further developed. This development, to some degree, is almost guaranteed. Muck frames it as, "our interaction with another culture changes as we reconnect with our own faith and values. We ourselves are changed in the process."[172] However, there needs to be boundaries established in order for this to occur successfully. This includes being aware of our own worldview and convictions in order to "encounter the new religion with openness, evaluate our experiences, and reflect on how new knowledge can be incorporated into our ways of understanding life and Christianity."[173] As faith formation and theological development may be inherent with engaging in mission, is important that they are debriefed, unpacked and explored. Unfortunately, despite significant time in preparation, many find that they are not given adequate opportunity to reflect or debrief on their experiences, what they learnt and the impact for their faith. Such opportunities allow for "focused conversation (which) prompts mission-team members to tell travel stories shaped by biblical themes and theological questions."[174] Another core aspect of our faith

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[164] Genesis 12:1-5.
[165] Richter, *Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World*. p.155.
[166] Ibid. p.155.
[167] Ibid. p.15; This was based on survey data of 13-18 years olds in a Northern American context.
[168] Ibid. p.16.
[169] Ibid. p.38.
[170] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience.* p.19
[171] Ibid. p.19.
[172] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century.* p.290.
[173] Ibid. p.299.
[174] Richter, *Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World.* p.154.

formation is understanding our own personal beliefs and worldview. It is especially important that we are aware of this before imparting on any such missional experience.

One aspect of personal preparation which often gets overlooked is an understanding of one's own personal faith beliefs. This is also important before learning about other faiths. Unfortunately, "many students come to study Theology without having a firm grounding in their own faith (Christianity), which they should have, ideally, before studying other religions."[175] This is to allow for our understanding of faith to be enforced, not ripped apart. "Becoming aware of our cultural conditioning and personal idiosyncrasies is important as we seek to understand those of other cultures and religions,"[176] we need to understand how we have been shaped by our own culture, faith and history. Muck suggests two key concerns if we do not have that grounding, firstly; "we may mistake our own cultural views as the true and only way to understand the world or present the story of Jesus."[177] And secondly, "we may lose our distinctive way of understanding ourselves and our faith by overidentifying with either our own or another cultural group."[178] Through addressing and solidifying our own cultural assumptions and core beliefs we are better prepared to engage and witness to others. Along with post-trip reflections, detailed and meaningful preparation is needed prior to attending missional experiences.

The Importance of Anthropology and Preparation for Missional Experiences

In order for these trips to be successful and carry personal and meaningful significance, an adequate preparation process is vital. Preparation needs to cover training, study, anthropology and ensure participants have received sufficient training in *their* context as well as the cultural context they will be engaging with. Gibbs is one of many who have reflected on the need for a "renewed *theological* anthropology,"[179] meaning, "an understanding of what it means to be human from a faith perspective."[180] Gibbs reflects on doctrine and theological defintions, but affirms that anthropology and missiology must work together. His central thought is the need to start with the people, with the stories, to build an understanding of the culture *before* we progress into mission.[181] The preparation must "spend as much time studying the history, economics, politics and spiritual context of the community as is spent preparing for the activities."[182] Furthermore, there is a need for the focus to be on "providing students with a background in cultural anthropology for the purpose of being better missioners."[183] Despite this continued interest and engagement in mission trips and immersion experiences, the academic discipline of Missiology as a whole is facing decline, perhaps because many have associated the term with the old purposes of "saving souls" and "establishing the church somewhere new"[184] with neglect to interreligious dailogue.[185] "'Mission' is deemed offensive because it is deemed proselytizing (in the face of interreligious dialogue), so it must give way to the more neutral-sounding 'intercultural studies',"[186]

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[175] Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education." p.56.
[176] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.230-231.
[177] Ibid. p.231.
[178] Ibid. p.231.
[179] Gibbs, "Mission and Culture: The Svd Connection." p.304.
[180] Ibid. p.304.
[181] Ibid. p.306.
[182] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience.* p. 232.
[183] Dries, "Mission and Culture: A Historical Theologian's Perspective on Twentieth-Century U.S. Catholic Mission." p.225.
[184] Schreiter, "Missiology's Future at the Intersection of the Intercultural and the Interreligious."p.276.
[185] Ibid. p.286.
[186] Ibid. p.286.

although a rebranding does not suggest survival, it is a more hopeful association with the need for anthropology. Shreiter confirms the need of an interrelationship between theology, missiology and anthropology as he concludes, "if what missiologists do makes no difference to what is happening in intercultural studies or studies of interreligious encounter, then it has little right to claim for itself academic standing."[187] There is also the need to engage in research on the phenomenom of short-term mission, "anthropologists and sociologists in secular and Christian institutions have begun to publish a wide variety of research (on short-term mission). In particular, we have yet to build a substantial body of research exploring the cultural and social effects of these trips on receiving communities."[188] By being familiar with this research participants will be better prepared to understand the context they are being immersed in and the various impacts which may occur.

Along with more formal studies in anthropology, participants need to be grounded in as much knowledge as possible about the context they will be immersed in. However, this information needs to be relevant, meaningful and helpful. One practical suggestion to aid with this is to "invite people from the country or community to which the team is travelling to address the group."[189] Unfortunately there are many who encounter experiences of unhelpful preparation. One such experience involved, "having taken a college course on Indian religion, based primarily on an examination of its philosophical systems, and having found when I arrived in India on my first visit that I recognised in India absolutely nothing I learned in that course."[190] The preparation needs to ask, when we teach of other cultures, religions, places, are we giving an insight that would be helpful if we went there? Is it reflecting immersion experiences? The purpose of preparation is to *prepare,* making it vital that the information is relevant.

Encountering Ourselves on Mission

In encountering other places, cultures and ways of life, participants discover that they themselves are changed. This change is not just in their faith formation, but the impact to their worldview and understanding of many facets of life, including social justice and equality. Based upon his research and collection of interviews and narratives on short-term mission, Howell notes; "for many of the travelers, these trips potentially become a key moment for developing interpretations of social conditions such as economic inequality, cultural difference, racial dynamics, gender discrimination, globalization and social injustice."[191] Due to the nature of these encounters, "these interpretations occur in an explicitly theological framework,"[192] making their reflections theological as well as personal. Although many of them "struggled to make sense of particular issues, such as poverty, inequality or cultural difference… It was much easier (for them)… to speak about the relationships they had formed, the people who had made an impression on them and the ways these experiences had affected their spiritual lives."[193] Through this relational understanding, "one can admire the assets and faithfulness of impoverished communities without romanticizing poverty."[194] The idea of mission and the intention of service is highly transformational, one of the reasons being because it is countercultural. "Mission

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[187] Ibid. p.287.
[188] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience*. p.232.
[189] Ibid. p.232.
[190] Eck, "The Perspective of Pluralism in Theological Education." p.59.
[191] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience*. p.28.
[192] Ibid. p.28.
[193] Ibid. p.172.
[194] Richter, *Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World*. p.31.

trips embody a lived theology that directly counters consumer tenents"[195] and that "service freely given contradicts the consumer precept of assured return for investment."[196] Further unpacking this belief, Richter suggests "Mission trips *implicitly* present an alternative way of life that challenges consumer culture."[197] Reflecting on his own experiences as a missionary and researcher, Gibbs suggests a common reflection; "I am the one who needs to be converted – in my attitudes, my values, and my openness to different cultural views of life and death, and ultimately to a new theological anthropology."[198] He comments on what he learnt in this experience and being confronted with feeling "safe" as a missionary while vulnerable people treated others with Christ-like compassion. This is a helpful insight, for any level of experience a 'missionary' might have; that they can still be challenged to how they view themselves versus 'the other.' The guiding narrative on short-term mission also suggests that "encounters with need not only reveal truth about the world but also transform those who engage it."[199] Thus as we engage with others who confront our own worldview and beliefs, we too, cannot help but be changed.

Summary

Any missional or immersion encounter with another culture, community, faith group or people will bring deep personal change. In order for this experience to be as successful as possible, a deeper awareness of oneself and 'the other' is needed. Whether the encounter is part of a church group or formed in an educational setting, anthropological study and awareness of the community is a necessity. As is a solid grounding in one's own personal and cultural context and belief system. Theology, anthropology and missiology need to work as one in forming these experiences and also supporting participants in debriefing them upon their return home. The research and studies confirm an intrinsic thread of the life-changing and faith-forming nature of these experiences, especially for young people, cementing the need for them to be done *well.*

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[195] Katherine. Turpin, *Branded: Adolescents Converting from Consumer Faith* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006). p.102.
[196] Richter, *Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World*. p.37.
[197] Ibid. p.37.
[198] Gibbs, "Mission and Culture: The Svd Connection." p.299.
[199] Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience*. p.180.

6. DATA AND FINDINGS: FAITH FORMATION THROUGH INTERFAITH AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Introduction

In order to seek more meaningful insight into the role of pluralism on the faith formation of young people, with a focus on immersion experiences, qualitative data was sought. Through interviews and focus groups the common threads in narratives of immersion and missional experiences were discovered. The interviews focused on covering the context of the missional experience, engagement with other faiths and denominations, the understanding of pluralism and what impact this had for participants on their faith formation, and lastly, comprehension of mission and their personal theology.

Methodology

The intention of the data collection was to target young adults who had engaged in missional experiences in a multi-faith context, or to target adults who had those experiences during their youth or young adulthood. Due to the timeframe of the study, there was an initial concern with the availability of these sources and alternatives were suggested. As such, it was decided to target a specific denomination and a College associated with that denomination which engaged in missional activity within at least one of its courses.

One of the VET courses at the College had an interstate missional trip which involved heavy engagement with a variety of other Christian denominations. Although this was not a multi-faith experience, the interaction with other denominations still occurred in a modern, secular and therefore pluralist society, meeting the focused requirements of the study. Different divisions of one faith can also be understood as pluralism and aiding in understanding interfaith dialogue. A pool of students, current and past, were approached and targeted to participate in a focus group. Unfortunately, this was not as successful as hoped and only a couple of students displayed interest in participating in the study. Thus, interviews were conducted with these individuals.

Once the appropriate bodies of the targeted denomination provided approval, a wider group of people could be sought for interviews. The aim was to interview people who had attended a variety of missional or immersive experiences. This would reflect data from a range of experiences, instead of having stories from participants who only went to one specific destination. It was important that the contexts of the experiences differed in order to highlight the similarities in narrative within a multi-faith context and regarding mission itself, despite these differences. Due to the short time frame and the small number of interviews required, data was only sought from participants known to the researcher.

A questionnaire was used and followed for all interviews, this can be found in Appendix 1.

All of the interviews were transcribed in full and quotes have been used from these transcriptions. Interviews were conducted with young adults, who have a tendency to use discourse markers or filled pauses, such as "you know" or "um," in their everyday expression. These have been removed from quotes in order to improve the fluency of expression as appropriate for academic writing. No further editing was used on quotes.

The methodology involved summarizing the interviews into thematic categories, using thematic analysis.[200] There was also a narrative[201] approach to the methodology, one which focused on the stories of individual participants based on the interpretation of semi-structured interviews.

Demographics

Two students of the College were interviewed based on their short-term, interdenominational mission experience. These students were both male and aged in their early twenties at the time of their trip. Both of these students attended the mission experience based on their studies, which they went on to successfully complete.

Five other interviews were conducted based on overseas missional and immersion experiences. All of these experiences were of approximately two weeks in an Asian country. Places interviewees visited were Indonesia, Cambodia and India. Three of these interviews were with male participants, aged between 21 and 26 at the time of their experience. The female participants were the outliers in ages. One was aged between 10 and 13 on her missional experiences and is reflecting on them now as a twenty-year-old. The other was thirty at the time of her missional experience. Of the five, three have at some stage engaged in ministry education.

In an effort to protect their anonymity, pseudonyms have been used for all of the interviewees. For a more detailed breakdown of the interviewee demographics, please refer to Appendix 2.

Findings

Despite their engagement with different contexts, cultures and communities, there were commonalities through all of the interviewees and their experiences of pluralism and missional engagement. Many were able to discuss definitive ways their faith was shaped along with challenges to their theology and understanding of mission. There was an awareness of pluralism conveyed, even if it was discussing the multiple faiths co-existing in society without familiarity on the appropriate terminology for this. Those who engaged in interdenominational experiences spoke highly of the transformative nature of this experience and their greater appreciation and respect for various methodologies to Christian church and mission. All of the interviews indicated aspects of the missional engagement they were unprepared for. They reflected on amendments to the preparation and education process which, from their perspective, would have heightened the success of their experience.

(1) Awareness of Pluralism

All of those who participated in interviews and were on overseas missional experiences did so in a multi-faith context. During the interview they were all able to express the various encounters and acceptance of multiple faiths in the culture they were visiting. Even though they witnessed multiple faiths co-existing and being accepted in society, several did not have the language or awareness of this as pluralism. There was an interesting dynamic between those who have studied ministry and those who have not and the language they were able to use to discuss the co-existence of different religions in one culture or community. Those who

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[200] David Harper, "Choosing a Qualitative Research Method," in *Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy: A Guide for Students and Practitioners*, ed. D. Harper and A.R. Thompson (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2012). p.85.
[201] Ibid. p.85.

were on the interdenominational experience were students of ministry and even though their engagement was not in an explicitly multi-faith context, they were still asked about their understanding of pluralism. One noted, "I wouldn't say I have a good enough understanding of what the term refers to, to go on record."[202] When asked about his training on the topic he responded, "I'm sure it got mentioned once or twice last year. It's…the allowance of diversity in opinion or belief…So religious pluralism can be allowing different faiths to flourish alongside each other … and that might not be a very good definition either."[203] The other student's response was a very candid "what even is pluralism?"[204] Before noting he *would* have been taught it at some stage, but was unable to recall it. Both students had engaged in the course, albeit in different years, with one still holding a very well-formed definition of pluralism, despite his doubts.

Those who had received no ministerial or theological training had no grounding for a definition in pluralism, although they were able to articulate the practical realities of pluralism in the contexts they visited. In order to form a definition, some referred to examples of Multiple Religious Belonging. Which, as noted in Chapter 4, has some of its own controversies. Grace, who visited Bali, noted that as Christians they needed to show respect when entering places of other religions, such as covering skin. She gave the following analogy to explain her understanding of pluralism; "if I practice Christianity but I might have come from a Buddhist background so I might still have some Buddhist worshipping traits that I still practice within my Christianity… like a mix, of two different things."[205] David, who visited India noted, "(in) a place like India, where there is so much religion and it's been a big part of their history for a long, long time, a church in India it looks very different to a regular church in Adelaide… a lot of the women covering their head and covering their skin, and that's not necessarily part of Christianity. That's part of other religions."[206] Darcy, who also went to India, discussed this further; "it's hard to discern what is religious belief and what is culturally Hindu? I think Christianity does work well in a pluralistic context because of its incarnational nature and so therefore, some of the practices within the church were actually adopting Hindu practices… but they were redeemed to be Christian practices, but they were culturally Hindu."[207] Unlike David and Grace, Darcy has a background in ministry training and could frame the examples she saw as Incarnational[208] as well as discussing the difference between cultural and religious practices. In some overtly religious places, such as India, the distinction is difficult to make.

Darcy was one of two interviewees who not only provided a firm understanding of pluralism, but also reflected on what meaning this had for her when returning home and seeing her own cultural context with new eyes:

> "Within South India obviously there are many faiths that are practiced and many ways of being in the world and seeing the world, but there's also different ways of being Hindu. And I thought that was really interesting to see as well…there's obviously cultural Hinduism, but there's also quite devout Hinduism. And that was quite interesting to see then how that translated as people took on different faiths…that's not something I'd thought about within a pluralistic society other than Australia, is that pluralism also - it's not just different faiths, it's also different ways of practicing faith within a religion, within one religion. And I think that was really interesting to be in a different context you become more aware of that because it's not your own culture… And it kind of made

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[202] H. Andrew, interview by Author, March 22, 2019.
[203] Ibid.
[204] T. Thomas, interview by Author, April 1, 2019.
[205] A. Grace, interview by Author, July 2, 2019.
[206] J. David, interview by Author, July 2, 2019.
[207] J. Darcy, interview by Author, August 20, 2019.
[208] Gibbs, "Mission and Culture: The Svd Connection." p. 306; Gibbs also discussed the value of Incarnation in mission with reference to John 1:12-14.

me think about what is pluralism? And within my own culture, how are we accepting of people's different approach to whatever faith or worldview or way of being?"[209]

Nathan's comments on pluralism were focused more on being aware of the existence of other faiths and how to interact or not interact with them, depending on the nature of the relationship and context. He noted that while in Cambodia it was easy to see the expressions of Buddhism and other religions, as their statues, idols and offerings appeared obvious as it was not his home context. But upon his return home, the religious symbols within Australia become clearer:

> "Whereas, I would probably miss my own expressions of faith, even though I live around the corner from my church, which is a building in our town with a big cross on it! But I wouldn't see that. I don't see that because it's in my own context, so I think it's helped me, cos then you come back and go, "oh yeah, my faith is everywhere" or the faiths of Australia are everywhere, in buildings and what we value. So it kind of sharpened and made me definitely aware of what I wasn't aware of."[210]

Darcy reflected on a similar experience thinking about how Hindu's denounce their other gods when becoming a Christian. She related this to her own context upon returning home; "that's quite overt in that culture, so 'this is the Hindu faith and it has many faiths.' But I think for us, for me, coming from a Western context, I thought that is actually what we are asking people to do in a Western context too, but people aren't actually aware that they are worshipping many gods."[211]

Both Darcy and Nathan were able to reflect on the educational instruction they'd received on pluralism. Although for the most part they commented the formal instruction itself was neutral or potentially positive, this was not necessarily how people felt about it, with informal discussions on the topic having a negative tone. Darcy reflected, "there's obviously an academic and accepted way of talking about it and there's actually how people *feel* in more private settings."[212] Nathan's training was more ministry focussed and he reflects that pluralism was generally framed positively, however some topics "were about converting, so interacting with pluralism was with the express purpose of converting, and I don't know if it's negative, but it's critical…And sometimes that can have tones of negativity, cos we believe that Jesus is *better* and so we're trying to put that and sometimes we may miss what's "Jesus" and what's "context," what's contextual."[213] His comments on conversion and contextual misinterpretation are issues commonly seen in literature regarding pluralism. As noted in the Literature Review (Chapter 3) the issue of conversion brings a weight of controversy and a tone of negativity[214] towards both pluralism and multi-faith dialogue. Without proper grounding in one's own context, faith and anthropological awareness, as noted in Chapter 5, we can become confused between the distinction of discerning cultural context and presenting the Gospel.[215] Awareness and understanding of pluralism differed amongst all those who were interviewed, however they were able to express the impact of various examples of engagement with other faiths and or denominations.

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[209] Darcy.
[210] P. Nathan, interview by Author, August 10, 2019.
[211] Darcy.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Nathan.
[214] Gensichen, "Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions." p.40.
[215] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.231.

(2) Engaging with Other Faiths and Denominations

The qualitative data suggests that everyone found engaging with other faiths or denominations as "eye-opening." Most of the involvement with other faith groups while in Asia on mission experiences tended to be observational with the exception of Nathan and his experience in Cambodia. Grace reflected that it was more an "observation as to what they do differently."[216] She made a comment on the form of their offerings being "palm leaves and incense and plants that they put in front of their statues and pray over,"[217] in contrast to "Christianity's offerings are money."[218] Micah, who also went to Bali, was impacted by this same experience of witnessing the Hindu offerings and not seeing any "Hindu organisations" helping children in poverty or on the streets. "I can recall thinking at the time that it was almost a bit selfish…I was just thinking that these other faiths, if they gave all of these resources, instead of to what they were worshipping, if they invested it back into their own children and young people, what difference it would make?"[219] The expression of Hindu faith was very evident walking around Bali for Micah and Grace, even though these encounters were not intentional or necessarily engaged with. David noted a similar experience in India and even though "it's widely known that India is Hindu… you're not really as prepared as such about what that's actually going to look like."[220] He noted the common observation of women being covered and cows being giving priority on the street. Darcy also noted that "cows take the centre place of a community and are very valued"[221] as one of the key observations she made in a "culture that's been heavily influenced by Hinduism."[222] She also reflected on hearing the daily 'Call to Prayer' from a nearby Islamic Mosque. Darcy did share one intentional encounter with a Hindu community which was accompanying the Christian Church Pastor on a church plant; "the way they do church plants is they go into a little village and they put down a little tarp and they share with some food and then Jesus stories with the children. And that was a Hindu community that they were sharing their faith with and was slowly becoming Christian."[223] Contrary to the others, Nathan's experience with Buddhism in Cambodia was very intentional and included "teaching English, but I also did some Bible studies with a group where you'd have Buddhist Monks in it."[224] Nathan's experience included teaching the Bible to Buddhists and learnt a great deal through "encountering texts and maybe problems with texts that I *didn't* have…"[225] based on different cultural and religious perceptions, such as the role of family.

Interestingly, most of the interviews reflected that participants had engaged with non-denominational forms of Christianity while overseas. Micah's reflection that "over here obviously, you think 'what church is that' or what denomination, but over there it was just Jesus. Which was real cool. It was just Christian and non-Christian,"[226] was a universal experience of the Christian church in a culture dominated by other religions. Those who had gone on the interdenominational experience made a similar reflection of their understanding of church. Thomas reflected, "you go from a small service to a huge megachurch and you see the difference in that, but there's

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[216] Grace.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.
[219] I. Micah, interview by Author, July 16, 2019.
[220] David.
[221] Darcy.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Nathan.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Micah.

still God in that."[227] Andrew, who went on the same trip, echoed this sentiment, "it shows you that different denominations may go about that in different ways and that's ok. Because God is really diverse and broad, God is an infinite thing so of course there can be infinite ways that God can be reconciling the cosmos to God's self and it all doesn't matter because it comes from the one God."[228] Andrew's final comment cements this way of thinking, "I think people should get out there and get familiar with other expressions of the same faith… there's a lot of different denominations, but it's all actually the one faith in the one God and God's not actually necessarily bothered by the cacophony of denominations."[229] Those who encountered other forms of Christianity in non-Christian cultures had a similar reflection and noted how encouraging the love and discipleship they witnessed was. David noted that "coming from Australia where I would say, a majority of people would be atheist or just not a religion, whereas you go to a place like India, where the vast majority would have some sort of religion,"[230] meant there was a different expectation when engaging with other Christians. As it was an overtly religious country, among other Christians "it was almost expected, and it was a really lovely thing, that they just expected you to share your faith…which is very countercultural to what it's like in Australia…Whereas in India it seemed like a very natural, normal thing to talk about faith and how that affects daily life."[231] Darcy also reflected on the hospitality and warmth of the Christians in India, expressing that as countercultural from the scepticism and judgement we approach fellow Christians with in Australia, "they just saw you as a brother and sister in Christ…that challenged me a lot. I learnt that we do see ourselves as individuals and it is helpful to be in community for faith."[232] These reflections led to a deeper understanding of not only other faiths, but also what it meant to be Christian in different contexts.

(3) Understanding Mission: Creating a Meaningful Experience

All of the mission and immersion experiences had different aims. These ranged from working at an already existent missional base supporting local and international missionaries, forming relationships between Churches across different countries, providing physical labour and support, to developing a deeper understanding of evangelism and mission in different settings. Most of the mission trips were intergenerational, however the interdenominational trip was for students and Nathan's experience in Cambodia specifically targeted young adults. He explains one of the aims of the trip was "to throw a stack of young adults into the deep end and give them opportunities to teach and be in a context that wasn't their own."[233] Darcy also suggested one of the aims for her trip was to "have a trip for young adults so they grow in their faith and resilience."[234] All of the interviews suggests that the aims were achieved, many by stating "yeah definitely," and had tangible evidence they could point to which demonstrated this, such as buildings being constructed.

Nathan's experience in Cambodia was at a base where other teams came in to support a team that worked there full time. He commented that the young people on the trip were "definitely thrown in situations where we had to teach and to express our faith and encountered a culture that was just really different from our own…I

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227 Thomas.
228 Andrew.
229 Ibid.
230 David.
231 Ibid.
232 Darcy.
233 Nathan.
234 Darcy.

think the goals were achieved for all of them, they all had an experience that was really significant."[235] The sentiments shared by Thomas on his interdenominational experience was echoed in the other interviews as well. Even though Thomas was still in an Australian context he observed "there were so many different experiences where you were way out of your comfort zone… when you're just walking around and your eyes just get opened a little bit more of what the world is like outside of an Adelaide bubble. It was definitely eye-opening…"[236] Many commented on socio-economic factors they found confronting, such as the poverty in Bali, physical disfigurement in Cambodia, the marginalisation of communities in India and the homelessness in Melbourne. Although there were varying levels of preparedness for these experiences, all reflected on being confronted, challenged and inspired by the church's involvement with these communities.

There was a common theme in response to the missional engagement upon returning home which asked, "Could I be doing more?" Through this many suggested that their understanding of mission was not changed, but strengthened or broadened. Most of the interviewees returned home with a renewed passion for active involvement in the missional calling of the church and a desire to do that within their own context.

For some this was more of a personal angst about the deep need for mission and personal guilt at financial security. Grace, who was the youngest during her missional experiences, struggled with the poverty she witnessed and how to rationalise that with her understanding of God's love and grace. She questioned; "Why do people live like that if God wants the best for everybody?"[237] Despite being years since her experience, she felt those questions were still unresolved. Similarly, Micah found he came home and questioned everything he valued, before concluding, "my thought there is that it's important not to do one and think of 'thank God I don't live there' or maybe it's important to have a focus on constant, regular, consistent mission work in places outside of our own little bubble, our own world, cos I just felt so strongly God moving when I did put myself out there."[238] Much of Micah's reflection on mission was also about the financial contribution we can make, "we could do so much more by working a few extra hours or sacrificing a bit of pay and giving financially than we can by going over there and doing things on the ground floor."[239] These sentiments were formed from the clichéd expression of "they have so little," but showed greater introspection about how we can still be involved on returning home.

For others, this looked like a more critical observation of their local church and how they, the church and personally, can better engage with local mission. Thomas' experience meant he no longer saw mission as external to Australia's context as "if we look at people in Australia, we are very, 'un-Christian.' And we are so secular... we need to reach out to our local community and our neighbours as much as we need to reach out to a third world country."[240] He felt critical about what he had seen of churches back home but also how he personally engaged with that. This turned to internal questioning along the lines of, "what does it mean to be a follower of Christ? And to reach the rest of the world?"[241] Before concluding, "I need to be comfortable being uncomfortable. And stretching out to people you might not ever talk to."[242] David's reflection on a deepened

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[235] Nathan.
[236] Thomas.
[237] Grace.
[238] Micah.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Thomas.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.

understanding of mission was similar. He hoped these missional trips "would define the way that we live out that mission in everyday life…we're not going into it for an experience but God calls us to love one another, so it's not just me focused, it's outward focused. It's thinking what can I bring?"[243] David's reflection points to the question and desire to bring this sentiment home into his context, rather than remaining only engaged in a different culture. Likewise, Nathan shared that his understanding of mission was "deepened and broadened and challenged, like how do I do this in my own culture? My own context? How am I learning the language of community?"[244] In these reflections of *how* to apply what they had understood and seen of mission, several took a more direct approach.

Finally, for some participants this meant reflecting on how mission can be active and the different ways mission is modelled. Darcy reflected on the positive model of mission she witnessed while in India and that made her "want to re-engage with Paul and the way that Paul did missionary work."[245] She reflects on the example of Paul finding and equipping people who were already in the community to share the Gospel. "I saw this in India and it made me recognise that sometimes our job as Christians isn't actually to be the person but it is to find the person…It doesn't actually have to be *me,* but I do need to take part in it,"[246] which affirmed her understanding of both mission and evangelism. The model that Darcy reflects on is similar to what Nathan witnessed in Cambodia. When he returned he witnessed it was local Khmer leaders running the base, as opposed to the international volunteers who originally established it. He witnessed they had engaged the community and the international volunteers were "significantly outnumbered and it was becoming an Indigenous expression of ministry."[247] Which was for him, "a pleasant surprise, because that's what you hope for, that's what you pray for and to see so many young adults be stepping up in a different culture…was incredible."[248]

Andrew's experience of mission in Melbourne revealed another model which he found inspiring and encouraging. His highlight of the experience was attending a service at Salvos in the CBD of Melbourne, "I had a feeling when I was in the middle of the service and it's the same feeling I get when I read the book of Acts, it's how I understand the kind of Church that is founded when we read Acts."[249] He commented on the confronting nature of the church, with it catering to the homeless and others who find themselves on the fringes of society. He recounts an experience of a man vomiting in the service and the members of the church simply cleaned it up and "took it in their stride,"[250] without judgement or "looking down their nose at the people they minister to."[251] Andrew was heavily impacted by his experience at the Salvos; "they really take the social justice element of the Gospel very seriously. Which I was very impressed by and heartened by, I was like yea this is what Church should be about it. Church should be a little messy and a little confronting and full on."[252] Since his return from this experience Andrew has started visiting a Salvo's church near his home, based on what he witnessed of their expression of mission and emphasis on social justice.

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[243] David.
[244] Nathan.
[245] Darcy.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Nathan.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Andrew.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.

(4) Impacts for Faith Formation and Challenges to Theology

As evidenced by the above subsections, there are clear links between engaging with different cultures, pluralism, the experience of mission and one's faith formation. Many such connections have already been articulated, such as questioning God's presence in other communities, the need for active participation in social justice and how expressions of Christ can be found in other faiths and denominations. All of the interviewees responded positively to mission impacting their faith formation and many spoke of a broadened understanding of theology based on their experience. These awakenings occurred on the basis of stepping outside of one's comfort zone, the reality of encountering other expressions of faith, being in community and understanding the Gospel from another's perspective.

The concept of being confronted and "stepping out of comfort zones"[253] was reiterated through several interviews. Darcy noted that "it was quite challenging for people, so it helped them grow in their faith. I think there were a lot of different, confronting things, so for all of us there were different levels of growth,"[254] as she reflected on the experience for young people on her trip. Andrew and Nathan both came away with different realisations of God's activity. Andrew reflected, "it shows you that God is active, rather than you thinking it is all about God and praying to God, that's you putting you in charge. But realising that God is actually in charge and God's already active and asking God *how can I participate?*"[255] Nathan experienced a revelation of God's activity and his stepping out of his comfort zone, reflecting that, "both moments I think strengthened my faith in critical times… I came away from both trips just really excited about what God was doing and really excited to be a part of it."[256] David and Micah reflected that the mission experience strengthened simple truths they already held. Micah said the experience reinforced that "God is the one thing we need."[257] David offered further insights into this understanding, stating "God is the only way. Whether you're rich or whether you're poor, whether you can give every minute of every day to serving poor people or giving every bit of money, there's so much out there that you can't control…you have to trust God, that he's got it."[258] His immersion experience in India also broadened his understanding of God's love, in that love and blessing do not go hand in hand, but the importance of faith in prayer in all circumstances.

When reflecting on the community aspect of mission, all the interviewees noted that this had a positive impact on their faith formation. Being a minority, whether on the basis of race, culture or religion, can be quite isolating on mission, but having a community with the same purpose and beliefs can remove that feeling of isolation. There was also a general appreciation for the ability to debrief daily with others, and as David explains, "you're able… to talk about what stood out for them and what stood and for you and that can strengthen your faith in the sense that you're doing life together."[259] This was particularly important for young adults and confirmed the need for opportunities for debrief in missional experiences.

Many found the experience challenging to their theology in some way, whether it was being firm in their faith, questioning or rearticulating it with a better cultural understanding. Grace reflected that the experience

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[253] Nathan.
[254] Darcy.
[255] Andrew.
[256] Nathan.
[257] Micah.
[258] David.
[259] Ibid.

"challenged me in my faith and keeping it strong after I'd seen something like that."[260] Whereas for Thomas, he was aware of the need for his faith to be strong *before* engaging in missional activity. He suggested he was prepared for this before the trip and thus, "I've challenged that before I've gone on the trip as well to make sure you have a very strong faith and a very strong belief that can't be changed. Because as soon as you start to change an idea of God, that can screw you up a lot."[261] The experience of Grace, even though she was much younger, highlights this and suggests, as mentioned in Chapter 5, the importance of a firm grounding in your own faith[262] before studying others or taking part in missional activity.

Understanding theology from different cultural or anthropological perspectives was also reflected on in several interviews. Nathan's experience with Buddhists in Cambodia helped him understand the Gospel from another's perspective and what message was important. He notes, "we have to express hope...We call it good news, so is this good news? Or is this feeling good about theology? And having right theology? And seeing like what the people at the base were worried about was how to reach people and to express it in a culture that's different."[263] Darcy's reflections on the challenges to her personal theology based on the experience in India were also mostly cultural. She reflects that mission and evangelism needs "a healthy, social, framework… that understands the sociology of people and the anthropology,"[264] which she witnessed in India. Their different experiences confirmed the important role anthropology has in missional preparation.

(5) Reflections for Improving Mission Experiences

Based on their personal reflections in the interviews, there are clear suggestions for Christian educational contexts, and church groups alike, for improving missional experiences for young people. Core concerns are harnessing young people's desire to support mission efforts, creating sustaining relationships with those they engaged with on mission, the importance of preparation and debrief.

(1) *Preparation:* In almost all of the interviews there were key aspects of the encounter that the participants felt unprepared for. Some of this was intentional, as the organisers "kept cards close to their chest,"[265] for others it came as an unnecessary inconvenience. This included being aware of the accommodation and the *type* of missional engagement they should be prepared for,[266] and others were aspects of culture shock[267] that could not be prevented, even though they were made aware of it before going. Darcy, in particular, noted that not enough preparation was given to give awareness of the type of mission trip they would be on and how best to prepare for that, "if you're mentally prepared for that before you go it helps you engage… I think, we could have engaged better."[268] She also noted, "I just think when you do mission trips and everything the prep is just as important as everything you do on the trip."[269]

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[260] Grace.
[261] Thomas.
[262] Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century*. p.290.
[263] Nathan.
[264] Darcy.
[265] Andrew.
[266] Darcy.
[267] Micah.
[268] Darcy.
[269] Ibid.

(2) *Local Mission:* As mentioned previously, many returned with an awakened desire to be involved in local mission. It would be helpful for organisers to be aware of this and have arranged such opportunities for them upon their return. How can they harness this passion to better serve the local community? Some of the literature points to this is a concern and a need for churches and educational institutions to be aware of when forming missional engagement.[270] Some participants chose to attend other churches on their return home as they felt their local church did not have enough opportunities for local mission or social justice outreach.

(3) *Sustaining Relationship:* When reflecting on the experience for young people in Cambodia, Nathan noted that because they were visiting an established base, "it wasn't work that stopped because they left… it's helpful for the base. It doesn't detract from their mission."[271] Others commented that part of the aims were to build relationships between their church and others or other organisations overseas. There were different levels of success or continued engagement for participants with this.

(4) *Debrief:* Several commented on the lack of follow up[272] after the trip and that this would have been helpful. Debriefing is useful as there is a need for "having the people who help you understand what's going on is one of the things I've recognized is most important."[273] It is also apparent from most interviews that there was limited debrief following the mission trip to unpack some of the cultural or faith based questions participants had from their experience.

Summary

All of the interviews highlighted the life-changing and eye-opening experience of mission in the lives of young people, regardless of the destination or culture engaged with. Mission is highly valuable for the faith formation of young people and allows them to question, strengthen and explore their understanding of faith in a variety of contexts. It is crucial that these experiences are well prepared, structured and that adequate debrief is provided. Many found engagement with other Christians in different cultures enlightening and their faith strengthened as a result. Although not all had the language to support it, many were aware of pluralism in the context they visited and found it brought a greater awareness of it upon their return.

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[270] Richter, *Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World*. p.38.
[271] Nathan.
[272] David.
[273] Darcy.

CONCLUSION

Overview

The qualitative data and research held within this thesis highly support the claim that immersion experiences impact the faith formation of young people. Whether engaging with other faiths or denominations, participants reflected positively on the personal impact of this to their faith formation. There are several implications for how Christian educational contexts and ministerial training can best support young people on missional experiences, as well as their engagement with other faiths and denominations. The research and interview data both revealed that a greater level of engagement with other faiths, denominations and a grounding in anthropological education were needed in supporting young people's faith formation and missional experiences.

Grounding in One's Own Faith

Much of the research, as demonstrated in the literature review, is clear that a firm foundation in one's own faith was vital prior to either interacting with other faiths or participating in missional activity. This was also made evident in the data findings, whereby a student with ministry training was informed of the importance of solidifying his theology before engaging in mission. Meanwhile, one of the younger participants still struggles to resolve questions of faith raised on her mission experience well into young adulthood. It is important that when looking at entering into missional activity, whether it is with an educational setting or a church base, that grounding is given for one's own faith before the trip takes place. There needs to be a solid foundation before they enter into a context which will certainly be culturally confronting, but also may be theologically challenging as well.

The implications for the institution preparing this experience is then, how do they provide that foundation? How can they ensure that they are not sending young people into these situations with only their Sunday school faith to fall on? Certainly effort needs to be made in establishing *what* the faith background and understanding of participants actually is, prior to the experience, as well as opportunities to provide theological training. This will differ based on the educational or denominational context, but it needs to be acknowledged. Simply asking participants to prepare a testimony is not sufficient in ensuring they have a grounding in their own faith and religious beliefs.

Engagement with Other Expressions of Christianity

From the data findings, those who engaged in interdenominational experiences found this equally impacting for their faith formation. Their theology and understanding on how faith could be acted out was challenged and awakened by being able to observe and participate in different expressions of Christianity. Those whose missional experiences took them overseas to multi-faith contexts, still expressed a great impact from the Christian activity they witnessed in those contexts. Whether it was the focus on social justice, the sense of community or the non-denominational-Jesus-based style of church they witnessed, it was impactful.

Creating a strong foundation of one's own faith also comes through experiencing different *expressions* of that faith. The interdenominational experience the interviews were based on was part of a College course, allowing

young people to witness different approaches and methodologies of Christian Church. In order to help young people have a better grasp of their own faith tradition, these experiences should be encouraged and facilitated.

The research on interfaith dialogue also suggested the most meaningful encounters were ones which engaged and participated in how church or faith expressed itself, not having a stagnant conversation removed from the expression. How are local churches and Christian education contexts providing for these genuine interactions? How are they creating relationships whereby young people can witness different expressions of their faith and of other faiths?

Awareness of Cultural Contexts at Home

The literature review and research suggested that secularism has allowed pluralism to exist in Western cultures, as "no-religion," the secular, is a religious choice. Although many recognise this to be true, few have the language to identify this as (a) a religious issue (b) pluralism. The data and findings suggested that participants were easily able to identify cultural and religious symbols of other contexts. However, not all were able to identify those in their own contexts. This raises the question, how do we provide training for those in ministry regarding societal influence of secularism and how we identify symbols of faith in the Western context? Yes, we need to educate them about cultural contexts of the places they are visiting, but they also need to be aware of their own.

Most educational settings spend time discussing worldview and helping the students identify their perspective and understanding of the world. But do they give them more tools to understand the impact of cultural and religious trends in their own context? They might be aware, anecdotally, that secularism is on the rise and Christianity is becoming a minority in Western nations. But is this just in statistics leading to conversion? Or is this in light of better understanding the cultural and religious symbols in their own context and how this might be perceived by others?

Anthropology in Education

One of the key concerns arising out of the literature review and the research is the role of anthropology. Anthropology needs to be involved in our teaching of theology and mission and especially so when it comes to engaging with other faiths. Several interviewees also commented on the need for anthropological awareness before engaging in mission. It is vital that anthropology is relevant and meaningful. It needs to reflect the culture and activities participants will engage with when they are on mission. There is no point studying anthropology if it is focused on outdated data or traditions which no longer reflect that society.

Through a greater emphasis on anthropology, participants develop greater cultural awareness and sensitivity. They are aware, before they go, of actions which could cause offence and importantly the *why* behind many actions and beliefs. Christian educational settings need to highlight a better relationship between anthropology, mission and theology.

Preparation and Debrief

Many of the above points apply directly to the role of preparation for missional activity. It cannot be stressed enough that mission, even short-term mission, needs to be entered into with abundant preparation. This preparation needs to be beyond the formalities and logistics of the trip. It needs to be aware of the culture,

religion and people who will be engaged with and what instruction should be provided for participants. It needs to be reflective that the young people, especially, who participate in these experiences will find them life-changing and eye-opening. The preparation should be with a focus to nurture the faith of the attendees, not leaving them with more questions than answers or only being able to articulate clichéd reflections on their encounters.

Debrief, unfortunately, is often overlooked. As suggested in the interviews, many came back with questions and needed opportunities to reflect on these long after coming home. Although debrief is a natural occurrence while on the experience itself, there needs to be debrief once returning home. If these experiences are helping shape young people's faith identity, surely opportunities to discuss this and share it should be honoured? Along with debrief opportunities on the return, considerations for connecting participants in local mission opportunities should also be considered.

A Final Thought…

Engaging with other denominations or other faiths in an authentic and genuine way brings introspection, interest and insight into one's own faith. This is all engaging with pluralism is. Our role is to equip and support young people to be reflective and aware of these engagements. To enter into them with an understanding of themselves and their own faith beliefs, in order for these to be nurtured and strengthened. Immersion experiences bring breadth, strength and challenge to faith and need to be structured well to support the faith formation of young people who attend them.

APPENDICES

Focus Group / Interview: Question Guide

The following questions serve as a guide for the conversation which will occur as part of the focus group/interview. You may choose to make some notes or submit some of your reflections in writing.

Context of the experience

1. Context of the Immersion Experience
   a. Where was the trip / dates
2. Immersion Experience Aims
   a. What do you feel they were?
   b. Do you think they were achieved?
3. What surprised you most about the experience?
   a. What did you feel unprepared for?

Interaction with other faiths

4. Did you encounter other faiths/denominations on this experience?
   a. Unpack what these were
   b. The context of this encounter
   c. What was learnt from the encounter
5. Did you anticipate encountering other faiths/denominations on this experience?
   a. Why / why not?

Understanding of pluralism

6. What is your understanding of pluralism?
   a. Has this differed at all based on your experience?
7. Have you received any education / training in regards to pluralism?
   a. If so, to what degree?
   b. Has this been framed positively / negatively?
8. Has this been impacted at all by your experience?

Links to faith formation

9. Did the experience have any impact on your own faith formation?
10. How did being in community impact your faith formation?
11. Did this experience challenge your theology in any way?
12. Did this experience challenge your understanding of mission in any way?

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> *This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in South Australia (Project number 8217). For queries regarding the ethics approval of this project, or to discuss any concerns or complaints, please contact the Executive Officer of the committee via telephone on +61 8 8201 3116 or email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au*

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	Date of trip	Location	Age (current)	Age (at experience)	Gender	Degree or Level of Related Study
H. Andrew	July 2018	Melbourne	25	24	M	Diploma of Ministry – Intern Year
T. Thomas	July 2016	Melbourne	23	21	M	Bachelor of Ministry (Cert IV of Christian Life and Ministry / Intern Year, 2016)
A. Grace	2009, 2010 & 2012.	Bali, Indonesia	20	10 - 13	F	N/A
J. David	2014	Ikkadu, South India	31	26	M	N/A
I. Micah	July 2015	Bali, Indonesia	24	21	M	Diploma of Youth Work.
P. Nathan	2006 & 2011.	Battambang, Cambodia	34	21 / 26.	M	Bach of Science / Bachelor of Ministry
J. Darcy	2014	Ikkadu, South India	35	30	F	Bachelor of Ministry

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