

# Different but United

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## Ecclesiological Diversity, Eschatological Destiny

**Rhys Bezzant** reviews the history of denominations of the church, from the New Testament to now—to find common ground.

### DENOMINATIONS

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Christians are often asked to explain why there are so many different types of churches. Some are the result of immigration: Greeks, Scots, Italians and Germans have all brought their own denominations to Melbourne. The everlasting Gospel has made its home amongst many human cultures, and we are better off for it. But there can be a variety of structures too, with different churches built around deacons and congregational meetings (Baptists), elders and regional presbyteries (Presbyterians), bishops and synods (Anglicans), or pope and cardinals (Roman Catholics). In the Reformations of the sixteenth century Protestant Christians found it hard to accept believers with different opinions regarding the shape of the church, for it was still assumed that in a given area there could only exist one Christian denomination. Under the Act of Toleration of 1689 in England, it was finally decided that Independents, Baptists and Anglicans, for example, had to exist side by side in the same town. In our pluralist world, we would find the opposite hard to imagine!

But it is reasonable to ask nonetheless whether it is a good thing that so many denominations vie for our allegiance. Jesus prayed that the apostles with him in the upper room might be one, and in the logic of Paul there can be only one body if there is only one head, Christ the Lord. The ecumenical movement of the twentieth century was born on the mission field, when Christians from Europe or America confronted other denominations (perhaps for the first time), and asked whether it might be better for the cause of the Gospel to unite in one structure and leave other disagreements at home. Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed that the church could only survive the totalising pressures of the twentieth century if it was ecumenically united. But despite aspirations like this, does the New Testament allow for the possibility that different kinds of churches may live and let live?

It seems to me that the New Testament doesn't provide just one model for the structure of the church. Some churches appear

to have deacons but not elders (for example Philippians), while others blur the distinction between bishops/overseers and elders (for example the Pastoral Epistles). There seem to be different kinds of ministry networks amongst the apostles, such that Paul could minister primarily amongst the Gentiles, while Peter focussed on mission to the Jews (Galatians). Sometimes the holiness of the church is stressed (1 Peter), and sometimes its unity is paramount (Ephesians). Paul has different expectations of Timothy and Titus concerning circumcision, allowing for different spheres of service, as long as these were built on trust and not suspicion. There can be profound unity between denominations when the word of God is preached, the presence of God is celebrated, and the purposes of God are promoted, even when other disagreements persist.

At Ridley, where every evangelical tribe in Melbourne meets, we learn to appreciate the history and structure of various churches represented in the student body, and at the same time to see beyond our denominational distinctives to value our common adoption as children of God. Our ecclesiological diversity must not blind us to our eschatological destiny, which is better by far.

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**Rhys Bezzant**  
Missional Leadership Dean

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**FOR THE CALENDAR**

- April 11** Anglican Institute Lecture  
given by John Harrower
- April 16** Graduation & Commissioning
- June 1** Leon Morris Lecture  
given by Tom Schreiner
- Aug 23–25** 'Unless they Hear: The Urgency  
of Evangelistic Preaching'  
Annual Preachers' Conference
- Sept 22** Charles Perry Lecture  
given by Joanna Cruickshank

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**EVENTS WITH VISITING SCHOLAR WES HILL**



**For Pastors, Church Workers,  
Christian Teachers, Chaplains**

- Aug 1** Pastoral Issues  
Day Seminar at Ridley
- Aug 8** Missional Questions  
Day Seminar at Ridley



**For Christians**

- July 28** 'Washed & Waiting:  
The Church and  
Same-Sex Attraction'  
New Hope Baptist Church,  
Blackburn North  
7:30–9:30pm
- Aug 2** 'Saints or Sinners?:  
The Bible and  
Same-Sex Attraction'  
Holy Trinity Doncaster  
7:30–9:30pm
- Aug 3** 'The Lost Art of Friendship  
and Singleness:  
St Hilary's Kew  
7:30–9:30pm

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Please check the Ridley website for times  
and locations: [www.ridley.edu.au/events](http://www.ridley.edu.au/events)  
or join our events mailing list:  
[j.daw@ridley.edu.au](mailto:j.daw@ridley.edu.au)



## From the Principal

We have lift off! **Semester One**,  
2016 is underway at Ridley College.

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**PARKVILLE CAMPUS LIFE**

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Having had second semester on study leave last year it is great to be back on campus rubbing shoulders with students, faculty and staff. This year we are excited to welcome just shy of one hundred new students.

One of the delights of studying or working at Ridley College is the diversity of the College community. There are people of all ages and backgrounds and from many denominations. And while we have our differences, there is a genuine unity of the Spirit based on the fact that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of us all, to paraphrase Ephesians 4:3-6.

This issue of the *Ridley Report* explores several dimensions of the diversity of the Ridley College community. In the first article, faculty member and church historian, Rhys Bezzant, considers the issue of the plurality of Christian denominations and explains how we approach the matter at College.

Last year Murray Campbell, Pastor of Mentone Baptist Church and regular blogger, wrote a piece explaining the reasons why he recommends Ridley. With Murray's permission we have reproduced it. The photo includes a shot of Murray with three Ridley students who are members at Mentone Baptist.

Andrew Katay, the CEO of City to City, talks about the "Incubator" program for church

planters and how partnering with Ridley in this endeavour was an easy decision.

Ridley Online tutor and Ivanhoe Girls Grammar Chaplain, Megan Curlis-Gibson, gives an insightful review *Mending a Fractured Church: How to Seek Unity with Integrity*. This book arose out of a Ridley Pastoral Seminar back in 2013 and it includes five chapters by members of faculty looking at the question of what to do when Christians disagree.

In my welcome message to students this year I stressed the challenging nature of theological study. Theology is a melting pot of many disciplines, drawing on everything from ancient history to modern psychology, the study of texts to the study of cultures. But most importantly studying theology is challenging because it has profound implications for all of life. No one studies theology aright without being changed by it.

Please pray that the thousands of hours of study undertaken at Ridley College this year will lead us to be changed to become more like Jesus Christ and more effective in his service.

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**Brian Rosner**  
Principal

# Why Ridley?

Senior pastor of **Mentone Baptist Church, Murray Campbell** talks about why he recommends Ridley and how students from his church have been welcomed.

## LOCAL CHURCH

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I am often asked what I think of different theological colleges in Australia, and where we send our people to study. There are certainly many colleges across the country. Melbourne alone has no fewer than nine Protestant Bible Colleges.

For some time our preference has been to send students to Ridley College. This does not mean that there are not other suitable colleges. Nor does it mean that we agree with everything that takes place at Ridley. But it does mean that we have a confidence in the College to help equip our people for Gospel ministry.

**Here are 8 reasons why we choose Ridley College (I appreciate that some of these points are true for others college as well):**

**1.** Ridley is an evangelical college in the Reformed tradition. Sending people to liberal colleges is a poor investment and will likely cause them spiritual harm. Sending students to colleges where theology and Bible subjects are not core is also a poor choice. It is exciting to hear students wanting to learn about ministry, but without proper theological foundations they'll practice poor ministry.

Ridley student and member of Mentone Baptist Stephen Tan says,

"As a Baptist, I chose Ridley because to me it is the most theologically rigorous Bible college in Melbourne. After spending time studying here I know as well that it is great for my ministry training and spiritual formation."

**2.** Ridley is located in Melbourne. We want to encourage local training, and we are conscious of the fact that students need to develop local networks with other like-minded Gospel workers.

**3.** I need to trust the Principal. Principals have the unenviable job of leading their colleges through all manner of changes and challenges. The Principal needs to be godly with deep evangelical convictions and Gospel vision. I have a high regard for the Principal, Dr Brian Rosner, as I have for his predecessor, Dr Peter Adam, who worked tirelessly in growing the College.

A female student and member of Mentone Baptist who cannot be named, because she plans on serving Christ overseas says she is grateful to God for her time at Ridley. In particular she appreciates the faithful teaching and preaching of God's Word, the supportive community amongst the students and faculty, and the godly role model she encountered.

**4.** Baptists are welcomed. Ridley College has trained Baptist pastors for many years and will continue to do so in the future.

Donovan, also a Mentone Baptist member and Ridley student, says,

"As a student from a non-Anglican church background, I feel very welcome at Ridley. I enjoy having the freedom to state and discuss my views on various matters of church governance, practice and doctrine with other Christians who have a high regard for the Bible as God's authoritative Word, whilst also investigating how these differences developed and how they relate to the teaching of Scripture. I have enjoyed learning how to study and interpret God's Word in a rigorous and thorough way, and I feel that I am being equipped to handle the Bible well as I teach in a future ministry context."

**5.** Not only are Baptists welcome, but students of a Reformed and complementarian persuasion are also made welcome and respected.

**6.** Ridley College exercises Gospel generosity. Several faculty have given their time and skills to help us at Mentone in different ways and at various times.

**7.** Ridley has an excellent online Certificate course that can serve local churches well in training lay people.

**8.** Ridley offers useful academic and pastoral courses for pastors seeking to continue their education beyond their basic degree.

There is no perfect institution for theological training, but any college doing its job is one that works closely with the local churches.

We value the relationship we have with Ridley College, and we commend the College to others who are considering training for Gospel ministry.

**Murray Campbell (murraycampbell.net)**  
Pastor, Mentone Baptist



# Planting Partnership

Ridley has partnered with **City to City** to run its Incubator program for church planters. CEO of City to City, **Andrew Katay** explains why Ridley was the obvious choice.

## INCUBATOR PROGRAM

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Apparently 'kingdom collaboration' — the conviction that "together we can accomplish more than we can ever do alone" — is the number one emerging trend for church planting.

That's according to Daniel Im, who is currently guest blogging for leading U.S. church researcher, Ed Stetzer.

It is exciting for City to City Australia to be part of exactly this kind of collaborative partnership with Ridley College.

City to City Australia is the local affiliate of the global City to City network led by Tim Keller. City to City is committed to facilitating church planting and equipping church leaders for fruitful, missional leadership.

Now more than ever, leading a church — whether in its launch phase or later on in its life cycle — requires not only tenacious biblical and theological faithfulness but also demands the culture-reading skills of the missionary, the gathering and releasing skills of the social organiser, and the leadership skills of the entrepreneur.

**Recognising this, City to City's Incubator trains ministry leaders to:**

**Understand** the gospel at depth, not only as the power of God for salvation for those who believe, but also the power of God for growth and progress in the Christian life;

**Contextualise** (without diluting) that gospel so that its ministry fulfils the Apostle Paul's mandate for intelligibility in 1 Corinthians 14; and

**Equip** believers for public as well as private discipleship, which is crucial in our post-Christian culture.

All of this resonates strongly with Ridley's own vision and mission for the City of Melbourne and beyond.

And so a collaboration seemed natural!

The Incubator is taught as four MA units, each one over 4 days per semester. The content is built around adult education principles that ensure the material is delivered in a learner-centred way. Aiming at transformation rather than just information, the Incubator employs a creative mix of gospel centred community, set readings, video content, and learning activities.

Ridley has been a fantastic host for the Incubator. Its culture of biblical and theological faithfulness and ministry creativity – not to mention its comfortable and extremely well-

equipped class room setting – dovetails perfectly with the values of the Incubator. Each semester the Incubator has attracted more students from across the denominations. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Ridley.

Of course, one thing leads to another, and so I was privileged to film many of the online learning videos for Ridley's core course, Leading People to Christ – another example of Ridley's cutting edge commitment to theological education and formation.

Ridley has been used by God for decades as a servant of the gospel in Melbourne, and throughout the whole of Australia. City to City is delighted to partner with this work.

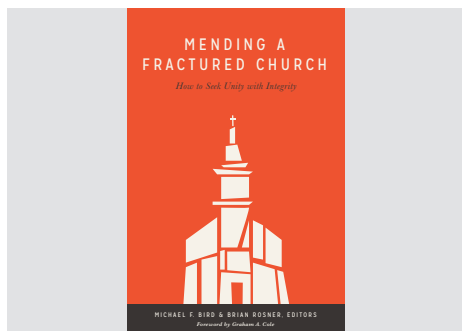
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**Andrew Katay**  
CEO, City to City

## Book Review

**Rev. Megan Curlis-Gibson** delves into Ridley's latest offering published by the Logos Printers, Lexham Press.

### MENDING A FRACTURED CHURCH

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If it wasn't already clear through the diversity of its student body (denominational, theological – and through Ridley Online, geographical!), the new book *Mending a Fractured Church*, edited by Michael Bird and Brian Rosner, is evidence that Ridley is well suited to make a significant contribution to a culture of loving respect and cooperation within the Australian church and beyond. Five faculty members, along with American scholar Peter J. Leithart, have contributed chapters drawing from Old and New Testament studies as well as church history and sociology, to explore issues concerning division and unity in the church, with a commendably practical edge. Their common thread is one we would

do well to take to heart: "The [biblical] call away from hasty judgment is far more prevalent than we might wish" whereas "the struggle to maintain Christian unity (in the Truth) is itself the first step of love toward others."

Wilson's treatment of Joshua 22, calling for careful understanding of motive and actions, and Bird's discussion of love and schism in the Johannine letters are insightful and useful. For me, Brian Rosner's chapter on Romans 14 is material worth coming back to again and again, not simply for church leadership but for our own discipleship. Each of us falls into the sin of "judging or despising" Christians who differ, in our hearts and on social media! Perhaps Rosner's most significant contribution to the discussion today is his articulation of the seriousness with which each party would have felt the issue addressed by Paul. For those involved, it felt far from "secondary" or "adiaphora", but involved biblical commands, issues of interpretation, questions of the centrality of the Word of God, and the scope of gospel freedom in Christ. It is too easy for us to sidestep the challenge to "please others" and "pursue what leads to peace" by elevating our deeply felt issues to "first importance" when Paul's instructions are perfectly pertinent to our situation.

The issue of how we express our unity in Christ, despite our deep differences, is so paramount that if anything, this book is too short for its task, occasionally falling back on evangelical "shorthand" (possibly due to its origin as a day symposium) and lack of detail in examples (due to concerns for sensitivity). But even points made briefly can be springboards for further investigation for the reader, such as Andrew Malone's questioning of whether cultural issues

concerning authority and territory, along with the way we read Scripture (synchronic monolith vs. diachronic progression), play a part in our determination of what is non-negotiable or disputable. Similarly, Rhys Bezzant's observation that missional cooperation in the eighteenth century centered amongst those who had a shared emphasis and experience of personal regeneration, might encourage us to investigate further the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit in establishing and maintaining unity and love within congregations and across denominational lines. Finally, Leithart's fascinating description of new African and Chinese denominations – arguing that our traditional classifications of Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant no longer apply – stirred my imagination. How will Western Christianity be ministered to by others in the future? What will be possible for the worldwide church when labelling of others (often because academic interest is far less risky than personal engagement) takes second place to the continual reformation of our own practice and preferences, so that we might embrace a humility that shines a light on what is always "of first importance" – that Christ died for our sins and rose again according to the Scriptures?

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**Megan Curlis-Gibson**  
Chaplain, Ivanhoe Girls Grammar  
Old Testament Tutor, Ridley Online  
Ridley College graduate



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