“Let’s admit, sometimes church is a bit of a weird world.”

Neighbours

We have the very best of neighbours. Over the past three years, our neighbours have taken out our rubbish, hung out our washing, babysat our children, cooked meals for us, brought us empathetic chocolate cake when they heard our children crying at 5am, and bought earplugs (for themselves) for the same reason.

Our home of the past three years has been unrivalled by any other. Here, we are surrounded by parklands, bringing with them the constant warbling of Magpies and the unmistakable screech of Rainbow Lorikeets.
In the afternoon the low sun illuminates the gum-trees on the golf course, lighting up our whole house for about 15 brilliant minutes. The proximity of the zoo lends itself to a flagrant abuse of our membership, and the nearby wetlands, park, and duck pond provide copious opportunities for outings.

The community that we are a part of is exceptional. People remember our names here. We are not only endured but are welcomed to chapel. We receive smiles when we break the silence of the library. No one has reprimanded us at the mysterious disappearance of the table tennis balls (not entirely our fault, I’m sure, although I did find one in our toy-box last week… sorry).

In two months time we are leaving Ridley. Joel’s study has come to its end and we are returning to South Australia.

We are anticipating that our next home will be quite the contrast to this one. We will be living in Roxby Downs, a mining town in the middle of South Australia, three hours drive from the nearest rural centre. We’re assuming that we won’t be a five minute walk from the zoo, and that we will never again, this side of heaven, have the peculiar blessing and privilege of neighbours and a community like ours. We are overjoyed to see the assurance of your faith as you confess that Jesus is Lord and act that out in your love for us and for each other. And we are so thankful for what you have taught us about how to be Christ-like in our love and service of others.

We will miss the proximity of the Ridley library and the opportunities that has provided us to extend our thinking on many issues. We will miss the instant hot water in the student lounge. We will miss Hot Dish. Our children, although they currently don’t know any different, will miss our whopper of a backyard. We will miss watching unfolding romances from our lounge room window (we will not miss getting caught doing so).

Thank you to the staff, faculty, students and spouses of Ridley who have extended such grace towards us. It has been the best three years of our (albeit four year) marriage, and we leave feeling built up and nurtured, and are very grateful.
1. Tell us a little about yourself and your interests.

I have moved around all my life so my interests have varied according to my location. When we lived in a small country town in WA, I learned china painting and was in the local dramatic society. On Groote Eylandt, Aboriginal friends took us turtle hunting at night. In Hong Kong I enjoyed hiking in the country parks. Back in Melbourne, I like to read and garden.

2. How did you become a Christian?

I grew up in a non-Christian home, but God met me when I was a young child. In Grade 1, I had a friend who was a Catholic, she filled me in on the Trinity and some other basic details. I moved interstate in Grade 2 and lost both my theological informant and my contact with God (I didn't know he lived in Sydney as well). I gained enough knowledge from CRE classes to know I needed to make a personal commitment. I attended a Billy Graham crusade in my first year of secondary school, and signed up to live for God. I joined the local Anglican church, then moved back to Melbourne at the start of Year 9 and grew into leadership roles as a teenager in my school and church and other organisations. I applied to come to Ridley after Year 12, but was advised to take ‘a year’ to do something else first. It took me about 25 years, but I finally made it back to Ridley in 2000.

3. Knowing several different languages, what is your best piece of advice for students scurrying to scratch up on Greek and Hebrew with just a few weeks before exams?

Working on vocab is key. If you begin revising now, you can firm up your vocab not just for the exam but for keeps. Focus on a small number of words and go over them a few times in the day. Review them the next day and add some more. When you can recall them without any prompts, they are yours. Keep reviewing them every week so your long term memory knows you want to keep them. Do the same with paradigms, one at a time, and start reading any Scripture you will need to translate. Copy it out and make sure you know all the relevant vocab and grammar. Memorising some verses of Scripture in Greek or Hebrew is also helpful for some people.

4. What is the top item on your bucket list?

Society of Biblical Literature Conference in San Diego in November - it is actually in the bucket, as I am going.

5. If you could only teach one subject what would it be?

If I could only teach one subject, I would like to teach something new every year.

6. What is one thing that you would want all Ridley students to graduate knowing?

That God loves them. A true inner knowledge of being loved by God through Jesus Christ is the basis for loving God, neighbour and self, and is the most valuable asset for Christian life and ministry.
Why I cannot tell you what is true Islam.

- Anon.

In response to the violence of ISIS, many Muslims took to social media to denounce them with the hashtag #NotInMyName. Here are two groups now advancing competing visions of Islam and so Mark Durie wrote: ‘this begs the question: “What is the real Islam?”’.¹

That question had been addressed in the negative by President Obama who declared that ‘ISIL is not "Islamic."’¹ ISIS responded to Obama and mocked him for his presumption in suddenly becoming ‘a sheikh, mufti (Islamic scholar that issues verdicts), and an Islamic preacher, warning the people and preaching in defense of Islam.’¹

This criticism highlights that the Islamic Jurisprudence is a sophisticated discipline that requires an extraordinary familiarity with a vast array of religious texts, history and legal precedent. Declaring what is ‘Islamic’ and what it isn’t is a complex business. It is especially so for non-Muslims. Even, as I am suggesting in this brief article, nonsensical. It is nonsensical because for me to declare that ‘True Islam is X’, I am presupposing that there is a well-defined set of propositions that comprise the concept of ‘True Islam’. But I, as a Christian, don’t actually believe in a universal, coherent ‘True Islam’ as if it were some kind of Platonic ideal that exists somehow abstracted from the people that believe in it. Count me as a nominalist on this one. For me, there are just the particular individual representations of the worldviews of people that I can get to know. You might say that even if we don’t agree with it, ‘True Islam’ is whatever the Islamic texts say it is. Now, not only do we have to agree on what those texts are and the relative authority of each, and not only do we have to choose a specific hermeneutical strategy to understand them, but unless the texts are entirely self-consistent (which is a faith position that I, as a Christian, do not share), we may still end up with various equally justifiable but mutually exclusive conclusions from them. So unless I hold that there is uniquely one correct and universal form of Islam that conforms to Truth in the mind of God, I have no yardstick to measure one form of Islam against another.

³ https://ia801400.us.archive.org/34/items/mir225/English_Translation.pdf They similarly mocked Sec. of State John Kerry as ‘the uncircumcised old geezer’ who ‘suddenly became an Islamic jurist, issuing a verdict to the people that the Islamic State was distorting Islam’.
I can use the term ‘Islam’ as shorthand to discuss in broad terms what vast numbers of confessing Muslims believe in. But as soon as we arrive at discussing a disputed matter, I have no right to adjudicate between them as to which better represents something which I don’t even believe in. A Muslim, however, who believes that there is indeed a true concept of Islam, can express their judgment that ‘True Islam is X’, just as I as a Christian can reasonably express the opinion that ‘True Christianity is Y’. The Muslim and the Christian then have the right to critique the views of the other, to spot inconsistencies in respective positions and to argue the matter passionately but at no point can I declare to my debating partner that their view doesn’t represent ‘True Islam’ because it’s not something I even believe exists anyway (in an Ideal sense).

I’ve asked most of my Muslim friends their opinion of ISIS and each one has told me that they despise ISIS. They hate their brutality and the chaos they have brought in the region. ISIS doesn’t speak for them and I cannot insist that they do. The arrival of ISIS on the scene brings to the foreground the issues how of they interpret the texts and the history that ISIS use to justify their own actions (such as those points Brother Rachid mentioned in his viral video addressed to President Obama on this issue). However, I must leave it up to my friend to present their view on how their concept of Islam and their interpretive strategy approaches these texts. I can question inconsistency where I suspect it but I cannot insist on my own hermeneutics instead of theirs. It just wouldn’t connect with their perspective and render any critique I offer invalid. Instead, my charge is to speak about Jesus, the Truth, and challenge my friends with how their beliefs cohere with Him rather than any concept I have of ‘True Islam’.

So Phillip Jensen was indeed right to criticize Obama saying that: ‘We should take our opponents self-identity seriously.’ Similarly Roy Ciampa was right in response to him that we must not insist ‘members of another religion must be identified as co-religionists with people who hold an aberrant (and disgusting) form and with whom they would not want to be identified.’ Both Muslims for and against ISIS claim to speak for the truth of Islam and need to be taken seriously on their own terms.

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4 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxzOVSMUrGM
5 http://phillipjensen.com/articles/the-truth-behind-isl/!
Wired for Intimacy
How Pornography hijacks the male brain

In week 12 last semester Brian gave three sermons on sex in chapel and William Struthers' visit to Melbourne was highly promoted. Dr Struthers is an expert in neuropsychology at Wheaton College, Illinois. He also speaks internationally as an advocate against various forms of sexual exploitation (i.e. pornography, prostitution, sex trafficking). In wanting to encourage the reading of Struthers’ book, I’ve written the following...

I was surprised at a recent Ridley social night when someone looked at the cover of a DVD to watch and objected because the movie contained some nudity. It all depends on the context, I thought, because surely some nudity isn’t necessarily immoral... A conversation started, as I recalled my umbrage at the animated background-scenes of a video game on the big screen a few hours earlier. All animated, it contained two characters. Both women. Both scantily clad. One was the DJ. The other dancing (more gyrating) inside a cage to the music. It appeared prime for a sexual-violence scene to unfold. It was horrendous and exactly what our culture comfortably places inside ‘G’ and ‘PG’ rated environments.

But this was the game played by Christians on the same night, at the same event, where someone quickly objected to the possibility of watching a whole film that will contain some nudity.

William Struthers' Wired for intimacy: how pornography hijacks the male brain is a great blessing for men and women. Personally, I’ve found it wonderfully helpful in trying to combat my personal viewing of pornography. Struthers subverts the hidden shame of the addiction by stating that pornography is everywhere. ‘You cannot get away from it; if you don’t view it intentionally, you will unintentionally.’ And the scary thing is that, ‘Repeated exposure to any stimulus results in neurological circuit making.’
After reading this book (twice), I now want to be sensitive to the reality that hours of playing a video game, albeit animated, powerfully teaches and changes people.

Understood this way, I don’t want an animation to rewire my brain towards immorality, subjugation or violence. I don’t want to view pornography at the news-stand, on TV, billboards or anywhere else. I recall my recent addiction to a certain news website that I visited regularly. On most occasions it would have some kind of a story or image trying to allure me through some kind of sexual content. Implicitly I would justify my viewing of these stories with the defence that I hadn’t specifically sought the material out (I was just checking the news after all). The truth is I needed to cut my addiction and view my news elsewhere (ABC or google are a bit safer). Sexual immorality (porneia) is everywhere.

As summer approaches I’ll need to be especially vigilant. When I’m walking through a shopping centre my eyes too readily wander in harmful ways. Because of our fallen nature, objectifying one another happens all too often.

This might sound all negative, but actually this book is refreshingly positive. The fact that repeated exposure results in neurological circuit making provides tremendous hope. Setting your mind on things above is an excellent start.

However, this book is certainly not about becoming ethereal and denying your sexuality. Rather, it outlines that our sexuality is a God-given gift to direct us towards rich relationships and holy living. Instead of being addicted to porn, the focus of the book becomes how we might become addicted to holiness. Our sexuality and viewing of beauty in others should direct us towards sexual purity and intimacy. Its about channeling your sexual energy towards sanctification. For those who are married, this physiological surge can be directed towards love and service of your spouse, including sexual intimacy. For those who are single it can direct us towards relational intimacy across many relationships by showing love non-sexually (e.g. through hospitality, service, encouragement and accountability).

Let’s be frank; the male brain is a sexual mosaic. Yet we’re all made by God to pursue holiness and godly relationships. Be encouraged that by recognising your own sinfulness you’re taking another step towards sanctification. Concerning this profound subject I pray that you too will be able to thank God that you’re wired for intimacy.
Have you ever had that moment, when you have invited a friend or family member to church who isn’t familiar with the service? Maybe it was the first time they had been in church for some time. The service is going well, the songs start, and suddenly the language of the songs immediately stand out. Nerves take over. You look to your friend to see their face, it seems ok....ok, it should be fine. The prayers are next. Again, nerves arise, heart is pounding. What the leader is saying feels weird and different, nearly unusual. You think to yourself ‘I wonder what my friend is thinking? I wonder if it’s all a bit weird?’

But let’s admit, sometimes church is a bit of a weird world. Churches sing together, sometimes really old songs. That's weird. They pray, sometimes together. That’s weird. In some churches, they chanting together liturgy. That’s weird. In some churches the music is so loud, it’s like a rock or dance show. That’s weird. In some churches, a smile is hardly seen as they confess that they aren’t good enough. That’s weird.

Don’t get me wrong, I love the church. It’s great to be part of a community that looks out for people, tells others about the freedom of knowing God, Jesus and the wonders of His gospel. I love the church in all its accents, its colours and different ways of doing things. I love that I can go on a break, and attend a church thousands of kilometres away, and still feel part of that congregation even though it isn’t the one I attend regularly. With all this, there is something I have noticed across different churches I have attended: it seems we have a way of speaking.

One of the channels on free-to-air television I am growing to really enjoy more and more, is actually one of the ABC channels for children, ABC 3. A lot of their shows are doing a great job of being both educational and entertaining. Shows like Deadly 60, Operation Ouch, and Horrible Histories are excellent examples, just to name a few. One of the shows I found recently is ABC 3’s News. This show attempts (and does an excellent job) of bringing the big news for the day to younger viewers, using language that they may understand. I may even start using this news service as my occasional news source. I hear you ask, ‘Why would you watch a children’s show to get your news?’, and I think that is an excellent question. The reason is language.

Listening to the language that ABC 3 uses is a spectacular lesson on the use of clear language. They explain to children big news events, not just events that you think are relevant for children. Hearing them explain the tragedy of the Malaysian airline that was shot down was very impressive. It was news that was important, it was part of life. They talked about this event in such a clear way, being mindful to not use the big or ambiguous words that other news services used. This was the point that really made me reflect on the language we use in our services.

Last week, I helped a fellow leader in our church look at the language we use in prayer, so that children may be able to understand it. It was quite a hard exercise, whilst hearing him say ‘I must admit I have never thought about the language we use, and how children hear it’. As I have said before, children are concrete thinkers.

(continued)
As I showed at the start, an easy way to test the language you use at church, is to invite a friend. It is funny how things suddenly stand out, as you put yourself in their shoes. Another way to test language is to ask a children ‘What is this part about?’, or even better ask ‘Why do we do this (sing or pray or even listen to the bible) in church?’ If they give you an unclear answer then I suggest you think about the language you use in church. We want to be an environment where anyone can come at any time, not just on ‘Bring a friend Sunday’.

If we consider lowering the reading age of church, we will find that everyone will be able to understand better, not just children. It is also an excellent challenge to try some weeks, so we are thinking about the language we use from week to week, and so we don’t get stuck inside our own little ‘culture bubble’ telling people this is why we do it… “just because”.

We want our churches to be places where anyone can walk in anytime to hear God’s Word, and see what we are on about. Church should be a place where events are explained in a clear, possibly even engaging way. We can still be who we are, with our accents and ways of doing things, whilst also being a place when every week is ‘bring a friend week’.

Stephen Urmston’s previous articles may be viewed
http://www.pressserviceinternational.org/stephen-urmston.html
Global Mission Week was a grand success!!

“Let but faithful laborers be found, who will prove faithful to God, and there is no reason to fear that God will not prove faithful to them.” - Hudson Taylor

Learning the skills of rice-paper wraps...
Getting into the spirit of multiculturalism...
Seen around Campus…

#sofit #nofilter

Have a photo you would like to see in The Log? Send it in to miriam.dale@gmail.com

Contributing to The Log

The Ridley Student Newspaper is made up of reflections, articles, poems, photos, essays, cartoons, and much more – all contributed by the Ridley Community or its friends. If you have something you would like to write about, an announcement you would like to make, or a picture you would like to draw, please get in touch with Miriam Dale at <miriam.dale@gmail.com> - she would love to hear from you!

Student Lounge Lockers

A limited release of spaces in the student lounge lockers is now available for semester two. Rental is $5 per semester, plus a key deposit of $5.

Contact Ben Soderlund for more information: benjamin.soderlund@gmail.com

Honest to Blog

We are also compiling a list of blogs from among the staff and student body - so if you would like a link to your blog on the Log website or paper editions, get in touch with your details!

EDITOR'S PICK:

Tim Collison’s Blog: http://strongerthanthor.com/
Elizabeth Culhane’s Blog: http://lizziethinks.wordpress.com/
Chris and Gillian Porter’s Blog: http://www.porterblepeople.com