

Chapter 4

Home-Coming: Restoring a Theology of Place Within Christian Education



Darren Iselin

Abstract To be human is to dwell within a particular place—from the moment we are, we are “implaced.” Christian education, as person forming communities, should therefore seek to curate, cultivate and celebrate emplacement, particularly in a contemporary age where a haunting sense of placelessness shapes our current generation. This chapter invites Christian educators and leaders to restore a theology of place within the academy and explores the high importance of place and how geography, location, community and neighbourhoods are actually part of a grander story of God’s sovereign purpose in and through creation. This chapter will review and explore a snapshot of the corpus of literature relating to the importance of place as a theological construct and will propose how an understanding and recognition of place can be used as a lens through which to curate the importance of place and implaced embodiment, within our Christian educational communities. The chapter will also explore how principles of placemaking within Christian education that are grounded in an incarnational posture can reflect and celebrate the significance of the incarnation of Christ whereby “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14 MSG).

Keywords Christian education · Incarnation · Placemaking · Community

In an age of increasing fragmentation, disconnection and social isolation, and where an aching sense of placelessness is prevalent across society; the restoration, application and celebration of a theology of place is of pressing importance. Christian education, as intentionally placed, person forming, interdependent learning environments, need to restore and re-imagine afresh the importance of a theology of place within their variegated educational communities. This chapter will review and explore a snapshot of the corpus of literature relating to the importance of place as a theological construct and will propose how an understanding and recognition of place can be used as a lens through which to cultivate and celebrate the importance of place and implaced embodiment within our Christian educational communities.

D. Iselin (✉)
CHC, 322 Wecker Rd, Carindale, QLD 4122, Australia
e-mail: diselin@csa.edu.au

Specifically, within this chapter, the importance of restoring place within contemporary educational contexts will be articulated and justified across three key themes:

Home: Place as a theological construct

Far from Home: Placelessness in a commodified educational age

Homecoming: Christian Education as an implaced and embodied learning community

It is hoped that through a fresh investigation of and appreciation for a theology of place, Christian educators may recapture the essential role that place contributes to all meaningful learning and formation, and will inspire a fresh reimagining of our educational contexts and learning environments as dynamic landscapes “charged with the Grandeur of God” (Hopkins, 2011, p. 20).

4.1 Home: Place as a Theological Construct

Place can be somewhat of an amorphous term that can have as many meanings as it has applications. Craft (2018) defines place as “part of who we are; it is both a physical and social reality. Whilst our bodies must physically dwell in places, our minds also structure knowledge and ideologies in relation to places (p. 8)”. Since creation, mankind has been placed somewhere, and the biblical story continually reinforces the importance of places to geography, relationships and human flourishing and experience. The starting point for any theology of place arises from the creation story of Genesis One which Bartholomew (2011) refers to as a “place story rather than an earth story” (p. 10). The theology of place presented in Genesis is framed “within a complex, dynamic understanding of creation as ordered by God” and how humans intentionally and purposefully interact with the places they inhabit (pp. 10–11). Through such a range of interactions, place can be conceptualised as location, geography and landscape, but also as an experience, a community, and a set of interrelationships, memories, and habits regarding meaning making. Such an expansive definition of place means that it is “not just a piece of ground [but]... an undeniable fact of our existence in relationship with the whole of creation” (Craft, 2018, p. 9).

Therefore, to be human is to dwell within a particular place and these places shape us in deep, significant and at times unexpected ways. Our souls, our loves, our relationships and our calling and purpose are inextricably linked to places. Because we are embodied and implaced image bearers, we find soulful purpose and meaning in our physical settings. Walter Brueggemann (1977) proposes that such formation in place allows human identity to be animated in:

belonging to and referring to that locus in which the peculiar historicity of a community has been expressed and to which recourse is made for purposes of orientation, assurance, and empowerment (p. 5).

We are intricately rooted in places and the locales, communities and landscapes where we dwell and have our being that engender within us deep connections and interrelationships which form us in deep, psychic and significant ways. Learning, living and loving all share an intimate and lasting connection with these contours of our physical settings. Therefore, because we are placed, and not merely situated, our places for work, witness and worship should not be perceived as merely individualised, autonomous or isolated, but rather interconnected and interdependent within communities, locales and neighbourhoods for God's good purpose. For this reason, it is important to consider place as a more multifaceted and multidimensional construct than a merely a personal call to serve in a specific setting or location—our call is intricately and purposefully linked and enfolded into specific and interdependent communities.

God works through people and places. And significantly, God works through people *in* places. It is for this reason that a theology of place reflects and amplifies the trinitarian emphasis of being in relationship through community (Allberry, 2012, pp.79–81). Our image bearing nature means that all of humanity is created to be grounded in implaced locales—in places that are bound in relationships and never intended to be atomistic or in isolation. Daniel Kemmis (1990) links the importance of this relational interdependence when he writes

To inhabit a place is to dwell there in a practised way, in a way which relies upon certain regular, trusted, habits of behaviour. Our prevailing, individualistic frame of mind has led us to forget this root sense of the concept of “inhabitation”. ... We have largely lost the sense that our capacity to live well in a place might depend upon our ability to relate... In fact, no real public life is possible except among people who are engaged in the project of inhabiting a place (p. 79).

The concept of the local church epitomises inhabitation with an implaced ecclesiology that reinforces being purposefully and divinely placed in specific locations, for specific purposes, at specific times. The New Testament speaks directly to locale and region when describing ecclesial distinctiveness and differentiation and the communities which were intricately tied to these places of worship, work and witness.

Just as the local church is “called out” from among its neighbours and divinely placed to a neighbourhood and specific location, so too are Christian ministries and organisations, including Christian educational communities, to serve not merely their own personal or institutional ends, but the wider needs and neighbours within their locales. Such a perspective underscores the crucial importance of being divinely implaced within contemporary educational settings and highlights that the location where we serve and cultivate Christian education is not peripheral nor inconsequential to our calling and service, but a critical part of the grander story of God's sovereign purpose in and through creation. It is through this biblical understanding of place that the ministry of restoration and reconciliation through Christian education, in all its variegated contexts, is rooted, orientated and animated.

The importance of place as a theological construct is further underscored by the *genius loci* (spirit of place) that shapes and orientates our identities and cultural forms within our educational learning communities. The intentional alignment of rootedness within place occurs as learning communities are deliberate about the

creation and maintenance of sacred places and their divinely implaced environments. One College principal highlighted this sense of placement recently when he reflected on his role as a long-serving custodian at the school where he served:

Before the foundation of the world, God has set apart this land for education at this time, in this place. In this way, God is sovereign, and this community is His instrument to serving this local place. To have an impact you need to stay – stay for a long time – I’m here living 400 metres from school Monday to Friday doing community – investing in this place and being rooted – living like a local, acting like a local, celebrating like a local.¹

Furthermore, this localised application of a theology of place facilitates the capacity for the stories, symbols and structures to reflect and showcase the importance of *this* place within Christian educational communities as they care for the community and creation where they are established. James KA Smith suggests that

every “culture” or community of practice has rituals of orientation and repetition that reinforce the mission, goals, and ethos of the organisation. And the best – that is, most formative – rituals of orientation and development do so in ways that work on the imagination and *don’t just inform the intellect....* Formative framing practices invite us to *become participants in a story* and find tactile, aesthetic ways to keep reorienting us in that story (p. 165).

A sound understanding of the theological importance of place and placemaking practices cultivates synergies between landscapes, living and learning that ‘work on the imagination’ and invite active and dialogical participation in a community’s story. These practices can be expressed in a variety of ways and can include intentionally using architecture, building form and design, facilities, gardens, surrounds, foyers, classrooms, open areas and other physical and natural environments to express distinctive cultural meaning and significance. Collectively, and with the symbiotic interactions, conversations and engagement of the entire learning community—a context-specific genius loci is shaped and celebrated. In this way, places are not just seen or merely passed through, but felt and experienced and loved. This level of intentionality regarding the critical role of place enables such educational communities to flourish where they are planted as they are faithful in their responsibility as stewards of creation and agents of reconciliation and restoration within their implaced locales.

4.2 Far from Home—Placelessness in Commodified Educational Age

Christian education, as intentionally placed, person forming communities, should therefore actively seek to cultivate theological placemaking principles and priorities, particularly in a contemporary age where a sense of placelessness defines the cultural zeitgeist. John Inge (2001) identifies that since the Enlightenment, there has been an increasing downgrading of the importance of place within society, and this “has

¹P. Vaiese.

worked out in practice with dehumanizing effect”, suggesting “that place has much more effect on humanity than has generally been recognised” (pp. 4–5).

In seeking to trace the causes of this displacement within contemporary society, Brueggemann, suggests our current generation’s quest to find meaning fails to realise that “it is rootlessness and not meaninglessness that characterizes the current crisis” (Brueggemann, 1977, p. 4).

Rootlessness amplifies the inevitable failure of the modern age that “human persons... could lead detached, unrooted lives of endless choice and no commitment... glamorised around the virtues of mobility and anonymity which seem so full of freedom and self-actualisation” (Brueggemann, 1977, p. 10). Such virtues cultivate a sense of isolation and self-interest that erode the capacity for relationship and human connection in and to our places. Bartholomew contends that “whilst some thinkers celebrate the virtues of anonymity and mobility that are the modernity’s “gifts” ... their inevitable outcome is ... *atopia*, or placelessness” (2011, p. 20).

The triumph of empiricism and rationalism across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries progressively desacralized the West, including a gradual yet insidious marginalisation then eradication of the construct of place within society and the academy. Bartholomew highlights this phenomenon and concludes:

We live amidst a crisis of place. In our late modern age, we have lost that very human sense of place...Indeed... in our dromocratic [speed focused] society every person constantly “on the move” suffers from placelessness in one form or another (2011, p. 17).

This aching sense of placelessness has significant and far-reaching implications for Christian educational learning communities that must confront and contest for the hearts and minds of an increasingly rootless generation who are shaped by the all-encompassing allure of unfettered freedom and unbridled autonomy within contemporary culture and society.

4.2.1 *Our Obsession with Spaces and not Places*

Whilst the concepts of place and space are interwoven, the particularity of place has, in the modern age, been superseded by space. Because our default position is now orientated towards personal space, we become active consumers in an ever-increasing quest for speed and individualised autonomy. Inge (2001) states that

although place was of importance in Greek thought, the Western intellectual tradition has tended to downgrade it, place being eclipsed by an emphasis first upon space and second upon time. This prevailing discourse has worked itself out in the development of Western society, the process reaching a dehumanizing culmination in the twentieth century (p. 62).

Within educational communities, traditions, rituals, habits and practices were historically always *implaced*—formed and perpetuated around clearly defined places, tightly bound relationships and learning localities, each with their own distinctive cultural stories, histories, symbolic elements, norms and assumptions. Lane (1998),

in citing Bourdieu's (1990) seminal work on field and habitus, states that the West has now reduced habitus to a "nonsacramental, individualistic quest for transcendent experience... We are, in short, a people without "habit", with no common custom, place, or dress to lend us a shared meaning" (p. 10). This unprecedented displacement of our habitus from our habitats has contributed to the subsequent decoupling of "landscape and spirituality" (ibid) that inevitably eventuates when we seek to live transient and displaced lives that discard and devalue the importance of place in our lives and learning.

The concern to move quickly and freely from one place to another perpetuates this sense of placelessness in culture, in relationships and community, and its impact has unquestionably infiltrated our modern social institutions including schools, colleges and universities.

4.2.2 *Placelessness and "Distanced" Education*

The empty promise of such lives without constraints and individualised paths of freedom and autonomy have transferred seamlessly into contemporary educational practices. Charles Taylor (1992) warns that:

The rise of individualism has wrenched us loose from all the settings that gave meaning to the lives of our forebears; we have been thrown back on our inner resources, but when we look inside ourselves, we find emptiness because we have been cut adrift from everything that once supplied the resources we are seeking" (p. 142).

David Brooks suggests that education communities who have succumbed to these potent forces become soulless institutions. He adds that these institutions "are more professional and glittering than ever, but in some ways, there is emptiness deep down" (para. 3). Truth is relativized and fragmented and the consequences are soulless cynics who are characterised by what Mark Schwehn (1993) terms "a disenchantment with the world" (p. 9), without any anchor of place to circumvent nor ground their aching disconnection.

Rather than being circumspect of these seismic cultural shifts, the church and church-based institutions, including Christian educational communities, have sometimes sought to assimilate and then promulgate these consumerist and commodified modes of practice that inadvertently can alienate rather than connect people within their communities.

The *genius loci* (spirit of place) that once powerfully shaped and grounded our identities within many of our Christian education communities has been replaced by a *Libera animam* (free spirit)—a license to break free from any established and connected roots or fetters to location, community and neighbourhood. The modern education lexicon is replete with terms that reflect this ontological shift away from interdependent places to autonomous and privatised spaces. Our curriculum is promulgated as individualised; we reduce student cohorts to commodified raw scores and standard distribution curves that assign value to impersonal numbers not names;

we engage “mobile” self-paced, self-directed learning. These new modes and models are certainly not to be universally discredited, dismissed nor discarded. But contemporary educational communities have at times been far from discerning nor circumspect in critiquing and evaluating these compendia of new tools and techniques and the consumerist *Libera animam* that underpins so many of these approaches.

Rather than these communities responding as harbingers for authentic and neighbourly placemaking that evidence and showcase their distinctive localities and communal cultural elements, some Christian educational communities have succumbed to the embrace of a plethora of disconnected and displaced educational practices and principles that disassociate place from their entire educational pedagogy and practice. Whilst digital technologies have afforded exciting new ways of engaging in education, some of these approaches have not thoughtfully considered how placemaking priorities can find expression in these new learning ecosystems and digital environments. Such discordant approaches in regard to placemaking in a technological age have allowed utilitarian priorities to prevail which perpetuate a neo-pragmatism that elevates the promise and practice of mobility and anonymity over rootedness and meaningful connection to place to alarming levels.

The recent Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) phenomenon revealed that whilst courses can indeed be free, autonomous and independent of location and geography—the lived experiences of an overwhelming majority of students have found that engagement and meaningful learning could not be sustained without an authentic community, a sense of rootedness and belonging and a real-time personal connection to orientate the learning process. John Warner wrote in *Inside Higher Education* that “In 2012 Sebastian Thrun, founder of ...MOOC provider Udacity told *Wired* magazine that in 50 years, there would be only 10 higher education institutions in the world and Udacity had a “shot” at being one of them.... However, [by October 2017], Udacity declared an intention to move away entirely from open access courses. Company Vice President Clarissa Shen said MOOCs ‘are dead’” (2017, para. 1,6). She went on to add “Our mission is to bring relevant education which advances people in careers and socio-economic activities, and MOOCs aren’t the way” (para. 7). Warner concludes that this was a cautionary tale of over-promise and under-delivery which saw the audacious vision to “transform all of higher education reduced to targeting niche corporate training occur within only five short years” (para. 8).

In reality, the most successful courses and learning that utilise on-campus, online and MOOC inspired platforms recognise that without developing a *genius loci* (whether digitally and/or in person), the course delivery space is void of authenticity, identity and purpose.

Such creative blending of places with spaces, of habitus with habitats, provides much thoughtful reflection on the implications and opportunities of navigating this new terrain for educational practice in a commodified age. It is why placemaking—across whatever medium or method we seek to adopt and utilise in our tech-savvy and constantly mobile digital age is of such importance. The failure of these courses also illuminates the danger in decoupling place within a contemporary the education milieu, where the quest for autonomy, individualised space, mobility and personalised freedom has at times eclipsed other teaching and learning considerations within many educational communities.

4.3 Homecoming: Christian Education as an Implaced and Embodied Learning Community

Considering these commodified and displaced demands that perpetuate rather than curtail rootlessness and atopia, Christian educational communities are confronted with a compelling rationale to turn hearts towards **home**. Bouma-Prediger and Walsh (2008), thoughtfully describe the displaced landscape of our contemporary age by contending:

Both postmodern tourists and global capitalists want to keep their options open, whether for the identities they will construct in cyberspace or the products they will buy at the mall. Both value choice over loyalty. And both remain deeply homeless because being at home is seen to be a limiting of choices and requires an acknowledgement that we are not autonomous but interdependent and interrelated homemakers (p. 263).

As part of God's restorative and redemptive plan, all of those involved within Christian education are afforded a unique and strategic opportunity to curate place-making. The wanderers and vagabonds of a placeless age that enter Christian institutional places (including staff and students), must be afforded a hospitable welcome door by these schools, colleges and universities that warmly invite them to come "home". It is therefore to this homemaking process of preparing the table through embodied practices of placemaking and the practical application of a theology of place that Christian educators should be focused.

In an age where personal space and freedom to merely "pass through" our educational communities are prized over rootedness and interconnected community, what should a thoughtful Christian response be? What would it look like if Christian educators were to re-orientate and re-imagine how embodied placement finds expression in our school communities? In an age where electronic learning devices are essential, what would it look like if student learning was to equally consider the embodiment, practice and presence of the pedagogue (authentic mentor and guide) rather than defaulting to depersonalised and displaced emphases on an information disseminator or content host? In an age where unfettered freedom, mobility and spatial transience dominate both the classroom and the curriculum, what would it look like to intentionally engage in embodied placemaking principles of hospitality and invitation to transform these learning spaces? The following three foci exemplify facets of how a reorientation towards an applied theology of place can contribute to flourishing Christian learning communities.

4.4 Place Restores Embodiment and Incarnational Emphases Within Christian Education

Author and poet, Wendell Berry (2004), encapsulates the embodied pathway back towards restoring the importance of place within communities by articulating how inextricably linked love is to where we dwell: "Love in this world doesn't come

out of thin air. It is not something thought up. Like ourselves, it grows out of the ground. It has a body and a place” (p. 88). If our explicit intention within Christian education is, as James KA Smith surmises, to cultivate loves, shape loves and rightly order loves (Smith, 2009, p. 18) then it is of great importance that we are highly intentional about ensuring that such loves—for learning, for leading, and for living, are ordered well within our local communities and are both embodied and implaced.

The importance of embodied placement for Christians is exemplified in the incarnation. The Gospel of John records that “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14 MSG). The incarnation has been described as an “absolute foundational doctrine, not just an irreducible part of the Christian confession, but the theological prism through which we view our entire missional task in the world” (Frost and Hirsch 2004, p. 35). The incarnation highlights the importance of intentional placement—The Son of God, whilst embodying the omnipotent and omnipresent fullness of the Godhead was not named Jesus of the universe—some all-encompassing and boundaryless abstraction. He was known as Jesus of Nazareth—bound by place and politics, history and culture, story and ritual. So much of His earthly identity was tied to geography and socio-cultural mores that some people even questioned his cultural pedigree decrying “Can anything good come out of Nazareth? (John 1:46). Lane would therefore contend that:

One necessarily reads the scriptures with a map in hand... The God of Old and New Testaments is one who “tabernacles” with God’s people, always made known in particular locales. When Paul celebrates the ‘scandal of the gospel’, this is a reality geographically rooted in Jesus, a crucified Jew from Nazareth, of all places. The offence, the particularity of place, becomes intrinsic to the incarnational character of Christian faith (1992, p. 5).

Through the scandal of particularity—of place, location, setting and culture, God entered our world—moved into the neighbourhood—and underscored that love really is grounded in a body *and* a place. The essence of the incarnational model for Christian educators necessitates a posture whereby the “enfleshment of commitment and knowledge must be widely evident. Teachers must be paradigms of that which we “profess” both academically and religiously... The sine qua non of an educator is the ability to communicate through embodiment” (Gill, 1979, p. 1012).

To embody the paradigms which we profess, Christian educators must take seriously the importance of being placed and imitate Christ’s “pitching of a tent” or “dwelling amongst” within our families, neighbourhoods and cities, but also intentionally within our classrooms and educational communities.

Christian educational leaders must therefore consider what incarnational postures and approaches best enable and promote placemaking initiatives within their communities. The push towards the decentralisation of the academy and the individualised and commodified nature of the contemporary “space orientated” workforce requires Christian leaders to be discerning and deliberate with decision-making processes that may directly or inadvertently undermine embodiment and implacement within their communities and cultures.

4.5 Place Reinforces the Importance of Cultural Liturgies Within Christian Education

Lane proposes that because of our endemic sense of displacement and our age's obsession with mobility and anonymity, many communities, cultures and organisations have lost the capacity to form habits that are grounded in habitats. He reveals: "We are bereft of rituals of entry that allow us to participate fully in the places we inhabit ... We have realised, in the end, the 'free individual' at the expense of a network of interrelated meanings" (1998, p. 10).

Restoring, reimagining and celebrating such rituals and practices therefore lies at the heart of any intentional placemaking and home coming within Christian educational communities. Smith's seminal cultural liturgies series defines these liturgies as "practices and rituals of ultimate concern" (2009, p. 86). that are "the most loaded forms of ritual practice because they are after nothing less than our hearts" (p. 87). He recommends that those leading modern communities:

will not adequately grasp what is at stake in... cultural institutions if we just look at what appears in the present or on the surface; we need to "read" these institutions and practices in order to discern the telos at which they are aimed.... In short, we will only adequately "read" our culture to the extent that we recognise... there are an array of liturgies that function as pedagogies of desire (2009, p. 73).

It is through these specific pedagogies of desire and their interrelationship to our locality and physical settings that a pathway of embodied placement can be effectively articulated, communicated, promoted and practiced within our educational communities. Such an intentional process can only be effectively achieved as Christian educational communities understand and articulate their own spirit of place, and the specific purpose, role and assignment within their particular place, at a particular time. The apostle Paul highlights this in Acts 17, revealing that God has "determined their reappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him" (Acts 17:26–27 NIV).

As these liturgies are purposively and consistently habited in real and authentic places and locales, a distinctive and tightly integrated habitus can form, enabling all those placed within the learning community to embody and enact the spirit of place which they inhabit. In this way, the opportunity to be drawn into the story of a place, the beauty of a place, the telos of a place, the calling to *this* place becomes animated and celebrated. This is especially relevant in an age of flexible work and mobile learning options and individualised course pathways where decisions by Christian learning communities may not necessitate nor are concerned about how placemaking and hospitable practices can be infused into every facet of their genius loci. Embodied and implaced communities who are habited in this way also rightly order time—as place gives rhythm, routine, stability and seasons: work and sabbath-rest, time to engage and retreat. Our embodied and implaced habits discipline our days and provide boundaries and borders in our otherwise on-call, 24/7 autonomous spaces. Bartholomew (2011) attests to these placemaking disciplines and reflects, "the best

writers on place speak of the need for attentiveness, familiarity, silence, slowness, stability, repetition, particularity, hope, respect, love... all characteristics and the fruit of Christian spirituality, but rare in our speed-driven, consumerist Western culture” (p. 320). Furthermore, Robert Benne (2001), traces the key conditions for Christian colleges to sustain their ethos and culture, and highlights the importance of these embodied cultural liturgies for learning communities:

Living traditions...also carry many practices, habits, celebrations, and memories that make them unique and attractive communities. They are dense networks of both meaning and obligation that persist over time.... It is important that that these schools have effective ways of introducing all new members of the community... into the living tradition that is theirs (p. 196).

Embodied and implaced learning communities will reflect and celebrate these living traditions—putting flesh and bone around these networks of meaning making as a placemaking priority.

In this regard, “The genius of the Christian university (or school or college) is to create a storied community... [that] must develop and prize their own spirit of place” (Allen and Badley 2017, p. 299) through celebrating these context-specific liturgies of desire that orientate and ground people within authentic placemaking cultures. Christian educational communities that are intentional about their people and their places, their placemaking stories, liturgies and histories and the particularity of place being seamlessly tied to their practices, enhance the potential to promote a sense of connection, community, and belonging. Through these placemaking priorities and practices, it may also compel and inspire those within such learning communities to ask: “I wonder what is *my* place in *this* place?”

4.6 Place Provides an Authentic Context for Celebrating the Now and the not Quite yet

Thirdly, Christian educational communities who desire to embody and faithfully live out the biblical story, should both recognise that place is of essential importance in this moment, whilst simultaneously affirming that all placemaking endeavours are but a glimpse and forestate of the ultimate place we will one day call “home”. Christian educational communities need to be reminded that our schools, colleges and universities are landscapes charged with God’s grandeur that are sanctified and set apart for Emmanuel, our God *with* us, in our place, our locality and our community. Christ’s incarnational posture means that He has “moved into the neighborhood”, and specifically *this* neighbourhood, and set up His dwelling, within our sovereignly placed educational communities. For this reason, Christian educators need to be diligent and highly intentional about restoring embodied priorities in both the classroom and the wider community in their cultural moment.

Such an orientation should seek to draw upon a well understood and well-articulated theology of place that encourages and inspires us to be welcoming place-makers, graciously and expectantly preparing the table for all those who come into our communities. The application of placemaking principles will seek to promote a safe, stable, secure, supportive sense of place, a distinctive spirit of place and a formative journey towards home for all. Through this recognition and celebration of the importance of place, locality can be fused seamlessly with learning and in so doing, facilitate an expectation that our geography and physical places may provide meaningful and authentic contexts for our place, pedagogy and practice to be enhanced in creative and dynamic ways.

It is important, however, to recognise that, in all of our faithful placemaking endeavours, whilst we are unquestionably a divinely placed people, and called to be formed within our places, we are all also longing for an ultimate homeland. The biblical narrative of place both affirms and celebrates the importance of placemaking but also echoes of our ultimate home coming. Anderson (2018) identifies this reality by stating: “This is the deeper truth about place: no earthly place can fill what is ultimately a longing for a heavenly one. We can stay here because we know we’ll never find our final home on this earth” (para. 34). It is within this liminal place between the now and the not quite yet, that we dwell in place, both as settlers and sojourners towards a kingdom to come.

Upon reflecting deeply about this in-between space between our two homes, Frederick Beuchner in his book, *The Longing for Home*, ponders: “The first home foreshadows the final home, and the final home hallows and fulfills what was most precious in the first” Buechner (1996, p. 3). Inge concludes that Beuchner:

understands that people and place are vitally entwined. He writes of how the word longing comes from the same root as the word long in the sense of length in either time or space and also the word belong, so that in its full richness the word to long suggests to yearn for a long time for something that is a long way off and something that we feel we belong to and that belongs to us. (2001, p. 235).

In a wonderful twist and delightful play on words, the concepts of time and space *and* place all draw from the same root word and will, one day, ultimately each find their fullest meaning and perfect divine order when we finally come “home”.

There is an elegant welsh word, *hiraeth*, that also encapsulates this yearning. Whilst the etymology comes from the root meaning for longing—its meaning cannot be easily translated into English. It is often used to refer to a longing, but the multi-layered meaning of the word also implies a specific kind of longing—a deep soulful desire for “home” and even a homesickness, that you deeply long for and affectionately seek after (Davis, 2007, para. 1). Whilst our learning communities should work diligently and faithfully to reflect and animate His kingdom on earth, all our placemaking labours are but momentary glimpses of what one day will be a restoration and consummation of all things for His glory. Only then will we be finally “home” and our placemaking tasks and responsibilities will finally find their ultimate fullness and completion in Him.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to remind Christian educators of the importance of a theology of place in responding to the divine calling to lovingly cultivate God's good creation through hospitable and embodied placemaking for all who enter Christian learning communities in a rootless and displaced age. There is much for the Christian educational community to glean from a restoration of a theology of place to the academy and the themes and foci of this chapter are but a primer for a more comprehensive and detailed exploration of the importance of place to contemporary Christian educational communities.

Whilst engaging in this creative and dynamic task, may we also rejoice with anticipation and expectation that our soulful practices of placemaking are but a foretaste for "home". May the *hiraeth* that is latent within our collective souls, our deep longing for home, be cultivated and celebrated through intentional and incarnational place making within our Christian learning communities. For Jesus himself has promised "there are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a *place* for you" (John 14:2). In the meantime, will you go and do likewise within your learning community?

References

- Allberry, S. (2012). *Connected: Living in the light of the trinity*. Nottingham, England: Inter Varsity Press.
- Allen, P., & Badley, K. (2017). *Echoes of insight: Past perspectives and the future of Christian higher education*. Texas: Abilene Christian University Press.
- Anderson, H. (2018) *Our place: Our family's long quest for calling and home*. Gospel Coalition. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/finding-place-search-for-calling-home/>. Accessed 5 June 2019.
- Bartholomew, C. G. (2011). *Where all mortals dwell: A Christian view of place for today*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Benne, R. (2001). *Quality with soul. How six premier colleges and universities keep faith with their religious traditions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.
- Berry, W. (2002). *The art of commonplace: The agrarian essays of Wendell Berry*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint.
- Berry, W. (2004). *Hannah Coulter*. Berkley CA: Counterpoint.
- Bouma-Prediger, S., & Walsh, B. J. (2008). *Beyond homelessness: Christian faith in a culture of displacement*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of practice*. Stanford: CA, Stanford University Press.
- Brooks, D. *The big university*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/opinion/david-brooks-the-big-university.html>. Accessed 25 June 2019.
- Brueggemann, W. (1977). *The land: Place as gift, promise, and challenge in biblical faith*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Buechner, F. (1996). *The Longing for home: Recollections and reflections*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Craft, J. A. (2018). *Placemaking and the arts: Cultivating the Christian life*. Downers Grove: Illinois: Inter Varsity Press.
- Davis, T. (2007). *Hiraeth*. Texas A&M University. <http://faculty.cse.tamu.edu/davis/Poetry/hiraeth.html>. Accessed 15 July 2019.

- Foucault, M. (1986). Of other spaces' (English Translation). *Diacritics*, 16, 22–27 (1986)
- Gill, J. H. (1979). Faith in learning: Integrative education and incarnational theology. *Christian Century*, 96, 1009–1013.
- Hopkins, G. M. (2011). *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected poems*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Inge, J. (2001). *A Christian theology of place*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Durham University. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/108425.pdf>. Accessed 15 July 2019.
- Inge, J. (2007). *A theology of place*. New York: Routledge.
- Irvin, R. A. (2017). Redeeming home: A Christian theology of place in a placeless world. *Augustine Collegiate Review*, 1(1), 75–88.
- Kemmis, D. (1990). *Community and the politics of place*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Lane, B. C. (1998). *The solace of fierce landscapes: Exploring desert and mountain spirituality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McClay, W. M., & McAllister, T. V. (2014). *Why place matters: Geography, identity, and civic life in modern America*. New York: New Atlantic Books.
- Mendez, C. F. (2014). *This is CS50*. The Harvard Crimson. <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2014/9/18/this-is-cs50/>. Accessed 5 July 2019.
- Schwehn, M. R. (1993). *Exiles from Eden*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, J. K. A. (2009). *Desiring the kingdom*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Smith, J. K. A. (2013). *Imagining the kingdom* (pp. 124–125). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Smith, J. K. A. (2016). *You are what you love* (p. 182). Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.
- Taylor, C. (1992). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Warner, J. (2017). *MOOCs are "dead"*. What's next? Uh oh. Inside Higher Education. <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/moocs-are-dead-whats-next-uh-oh>. Accessed 15 July 2019.

Darren Iselin has had extensive leadership experience within Christian education in both Australian and international contexts and has served in a wide range of CEO/executive and senior leadership roles within both K-12 schooling and higher education sectors. He is currently Director of Research and Innovation with Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and the Coordinator for the Cardus Education Survey Australia Project. Prior to this appointment, Darren was President of Christian Heritage College (CHC), a fully accredited higher education provider of over 800 students, offering over 26 courses across five faculty areas. He has completed extensive formal study, including doctoral studies through the University of Queensland where his Ph.D. explored "How Principals are cultivating Sustainable School Cultures Within Christian Schools During Changing Times". Darren's thesis was awarded the Grassie-Basset prize for best thesis in Educational Administration from The University of Queensland and also won the Research in Educational Leadership Management Award from the Australian Council of Educational Leaders (ACEL).