

The Colouring of Grey Literature

A review of “JVT quotes” and “Answers on a Postcard”

“JVT quotes,” a resource by Jonny Baker (<https://jonnybaker.blogs.com/>)

“Answers on a postcard” a resource by Rev. Jon Marlow (<https://www.marlow.me.uk/>)

REVIEWED BY STEVE TAYLOR

Te Ara Poutama Tuatahi Co-designer, AngelWings Ltd; Senior Lecturer, Flinders University; Honorary Lecturer, Aberdeen University
kiwidrsteve@gmail.com

GREY LITERATURE IS A technical term used to describe materials from organisations where publishing is not the producing body’s

primary activity (Schöpfel and Farace, 2010). It commonly includes reports, working papers, government documents, white papers and evaluations. Turning to ecclesially-grounded mission, examples could include Lenten Bible studies, video resources like Fresh Expressions DVDs, produced in the UK by the Church of England, or position papers on the funding of mission or strategic reviews.

While the academy produces books, the grey literature produced by ecclesial organisations equally articulates a missiology. Hence, they invite review concerning their missiological strengths and weaknesses. In this review, I consider two “visual mission resources” as potential examples of grey literature. Attractively presented, seeking to shape ecclesial futures, both invite reflection on the possibilities and limits of the visual in ecclesially-grounded missiology.

“JVT quotes” are a visual mission resource produced by Jonny Baker and distributed through Out of the Box Cards (www.outofthebox.cards). The resource involves thirty printed cards, each 6 cm by 9 cm. On one side are the words “JVT quotes,” white letters on a black background. On the other side is a quote taken from mission leader John V. Taylor (hence JVT quotes), positioned creatively in relation to a photograph taken by Jonny Baker. The thirty cards are attractively presented in a folded cardboard box, which provides further detail—“JVT. A Selection of quotes from Imagining Mission with John V Taylor, Jonny Baker and Cathy Ross.”

John V. Taylor (1914–2001) was an English Christian leader. Ordained by the Church of England as a priest in 1938, he spent nine years serving as a missionary in theological education. He later became General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society in 1963, then Bishop of Winchester from 1974 to 1984.

Recently, Dr Cathy Ross, CMS Director of Pioneer Mission Leadership Training Centre, gained access to Taylor’s travel diaries while General Secretary of CMS. This pointed her to another “grey literature” source, the *CMS Newsletters*, a personal communication from the General Secretary to CMS members. Cathy read 124 of the *CMS Newsletters* written by John V. Taylor and found

herself marvelling “at the contemporary and challenging nature of Taylor’s writings” (Baker and Ross, 2020: x). With Jonny Baker she wrote *Imagining Mission with John V. Taylor*. In promoting the book, key quotes were linked with visuals, resulting in “JVT quotes” as a visual resource.

“JVT quotes” offer a missiology made accessible. The visual format provokes curiosity, while the quotes show the value of a well-turned phrase. Quotes like “look to the fringes,” “dangerous openness,” and “the magnetism of Jesus Christ,” are poetic in quality, opening up new imaginative space. “JVT quotes” succeed in presenting the insights of a fine mission mind afresh.

However, the use of contemporary photographs forcibly frames John V. Taylor into our contemporary world, at times in ways that jar. The quote “guardians of universality” is positioned on a photograph of a person wearing a hazmat suit. The photograph, in a time of COVID, suggests a very different sort of guardian than that imagined by John V. Taylor. Another jar is the appearance of gender-exclusive language, evident in John V. Taylor’s definition of mission—“seeing what God is doing in a situation and trying to do it with him.” The gendered language used of the Divine is rendered more strange by the contemporary nature of the photographs, particularly of modern architecture and graffiti.

The priority of visual is a reminder that colours speak, conveying mood and emotion. Ten of the thirty cards work primarily in black and white. The overall sense evoked by the palette is thus of a sombre missiology, a contrast to colours often associated with imagination and creativity.

How might “JVT quotes” be used? Personally, I have used them during Lent, randomly choosing a card each day as an encouragement to think missiologically on the Easter journey. Educationally, they could serve as conversation starters, shuffled, then handed to groups. Even gendered language invites rich conversation about the images of God needed to sustain contemporary mission.

A second visual resource from the English Anglican stable is “Answers on a Postcard.” This ecclesially-focused mission resource

was developed by Rev. Jon Marlow, who at the time was Mission Community Development Team Leader for the Diocese of Exeter. “Answers on a Postcard” is an image-based exercise, shaped by Marlow’s doctoral work in different ‘ways of seeing’ and the implications for contemporary mission. His work in Exeter involved helping Deaneries and Mission Communities to develop strategic Mission Action Plans. He created his own postcards to facilitate this work, printing a range of colourful images onto cards (see <http://www.marlow.me.uk/index.php/answers-on-a-postcard/>). The brightly coloured images were used as prompts to clarify values and capture dreams into how they see God at work now and in the future.

The conversations that developed were then analysed thematically, enabling clarity in planning both locally and across the Diocese. As a result, over 1000 people across his Diocese engaged in significant conversations about future mission.

Again, as with “JVT quotes,” we note the power of the visual. Inviting people to think visually opens up different sorts of conversations and other ways of thinking. Accessibility is possible for those without formal theological training. The visual creates curiosity. With every picture worth a thousand words, rich conversations are possible. Both resources point to the power of the visual in shaping ecclesial imaginations. Both visual resources are a contemporary expression of a rich seam of mission activity that in times past included newsletters, mission photography, even slide shows.

While Christianity is often perceived as a book-based culture, the visual is an essential way to explore discipleship. A feature of the calls to follow Jesus in John 1 are the priority on seeing. Looking and seeing are affirmed six times (1.36; 38; 39; 42; 46; 48) as essential in the calling of Andrew, Simon Peter and Nathanael. Hence both “JVT quotes” and “Answers on a Postcard” meet the definition of “grey literature.” They articulate a missiology in which colour and image are integrated into God’s mission. Each demonstrate concrete ways that ecclesial organisations can use the visual in shaping ecclesial imaginations.

At the same time, these resources point to an irony in the term “grey literature.” The use of visuals suggests a more accurate description could be “colourful literature” instead of “grey literature.” Changes in technology, including photo editing and print on demand, along with cameras on cell phones, make all of us potential providers of “colourful literature.” “JVT quotes” and “Answers on a Postcard” act as inspiring examples of ways to add colour to the greyness of local denominational mission literature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, J. and Ross, C. *Imagining Mission with John V. Taylor*. London: SCM, 2020.
- Schöpfel, J. and Farace, D. J. 2010. “Grey Literature.” In Bates, M. J. and M. N. Maack (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Sciences*. Boca Raton: CRC, 3rd ed., 2010.

