



ON THE ROAD

Journal of the
*Anabaptist Association of
Australia and New Zealand Inc.*

No. 32 September/December 2006



Ed Love at the War Memorial during the Anabaptist tour of Canberra, an event in the 2005 AAANZ conference.

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"LIVING ANABAPTISM: SEEKING A COMMUNITY OF PROMISE"

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On The Road

The AAANZ quarterly journal publishes news, articles, book reviews, and resource information. It is published online with a paper edition available for those without computer facilities. (Paper edition A\$25 per year) To be added to the mailing list write:

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COVER SYMBOL: The lamb in the midst of briars is a traditional Anabaptist symbol. It illustrates the suffering Lamb of God, who calls the faithful to obedient service and discipleship on the road. This particular rendition is from *Hymnal A Worship Book*. Copyright 1992. Reprinted with permission of Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, PA, USA.

THE VIEW FROM EPHESIANS FOUR

MARK AND MARY HURST

...to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service

We awoke on the third of October to the news of the shooting in the Amish school in Bart, Pennsylvania. We were overwhelmed with sadness and grief. Mary taught school and Mark worked on a building crew with Amish men from that area of Lancaster County. A more peaceful setting is hard for us to imagine. And the innocence of young Amish school girls – we were dumbfounded!

The Amish community's forgiving response has had ripple affects around the world but we should not pass too quickly over their suffering. This is not the only suffering we confronted lately. In recent travels around the AAANZ network we heard stories of people suffering from cancer, depression, bi-polarity and other illnesses, a couple losing a child they fostered for ten years, women being abused, and deaths of loved ones. And these stories came from people who are serving God in amazing ways. Along with the Psalmist we cry "Why?" "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (Psalm 10:1) Why do good people suffer?

World news tells of war and destruction. We send out commentaries on these events weekly in the AAANZ Mailings. The warmongers seem to be getting their way. "They sit in ambush in the villages; in hiding-places they murder the innocent." (Verse 8)

"Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed... You do see! Indeed you note trouble

and grief." (Verses 12, 14a) The Psalmist knows that ultimately God will prevail. "O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more." (Verses 17, 18)

We know there is resurrection after death and we are encouraged to walk in the resurrection daily. We know God holds ultimate victory and comfort for God's children but we also know that at times we don't experience that victory and comfort. At times life sucks. We hurt. We get stuck in that time span between Good Friday and Easter morning. "O Lord, be with us in this in-between time."



The AAANZ 2007 Conference with the theme "Living Anabaptism – seeking a community of promise" will be held in Western Australia 19-22 January. We encourage as many of you as possible to register and attend this bi-annual event. It is always a good time of fellowship with like-minded people from around Australia and New Zealand.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DOUG HYND

AAANZ has this wonderful tradition of the President providing a report for each issue of *On The Road*. I haven't been in a position to keep up the tradition so far this year. The result is that you now get a bumper issue.

Running AAANZ

Let me first draw to your attention some issues to do with how AAANZ works. At a Special General Meeting members agreed to a number of changes to the association rules. Most of these changes were needed because of a slow but steady growth that is spreading the membership beyond the original network of friends that founded the association. Let me list the changes and briefly note why they were made and how they might affect you.

Change 1: Association membership nominations: Membership requirements have been simplified. The membership application only requires a signature by the person wishing to become a member. The former requirement proved impractical and limiting on membership from people who wanted to get involved but did not know an existing member.

Change 2: Membership fees: A couple of changes have been made to the provisions around the membership



fee. One change has been made to make it easier for people who are on lower incomes to become members. Anyone who is not able to contribute financially can become a member without having to worry about making a financial contribution - \$25 membership fee per annum. At the other end of the scale anyone who is supporting the Association and the work of Mark and Mary Hurst does not need to make a separate donation for membership. Their membership fee is deemed to be included in their total giving to the Association.

Change 3 – Quorum provisions: The alteration allows for greater flexibility in that it sets a maximum number for the quorum required for an AGM. This means that it will still be possible to have an AGM that meets quorum requirements no matter how big the Association grows.

On the future of the Association

The coming year will provide us with an opportunity to reflect on the future priorities of the Association. How do we build a network of networks? Can we find sources of funding to sustain and support the work of Mark and Mary? Can we find ways of sharing more actively and passionately the Anabaptist tradition of discipleship and community in a world of violence and fear?

I will be recommending that the Sydney Support Group take this on as a key priority for their gatherings next year and I encourage you to share your suggestions and ideas with committee members.

Connections with the wider Christian community

Jillian and I attended the TEAR national conference at Stanwell Tops this year. I presented a workshop on my visit to Timor Leste and the community school at Osso Huna. It was an exciting and overwhelming experience of energy, enthusiasm and engagement with the Biblical call to justice. It was a challenging and energising experience. I talked with a few people there about AAANZ and a good deal of the literature that I took seemed to have disappeared by the end of the weekend.

As a result of the conference I started an email list that is being managed by John McKinnon under the auspices of TEAR Australia. The list will provide information on developments in Timor Leste and report on the community school at Osso Huna and the work that Christine Vertucchi is doing with the Lafaek Diak Foundation. If you want to stay in touch with what is happening in Timor Leste then contact John McKinnon at: john.mckinnon@tear.org.au.

Voices for Justice

Jillian and I provided some logistical support for the Micah Challenge Voices for Justice initiative, hosting one visit to Canberra and driving people around to events. There is a detailed report elsewhere in this newsletter. What I want to record is how challenged and encouraged I was by the experience of joining together for worship and prayer with the participants on the Sunday evening at Canberra Baptist at the beginning and in prayer and singing on Tuesday evening outside Parliament House at the conclusion of the event. The curiosity of the security guard on his rounds as to what this group of people were doing was palpable.

Taking our prayer, our celebration of God, our passion to give voice to the those who do not have a voice into the public space in a manner that aroused curiosity and questioning as to the political character of what was going on was an important moment. We need to find ways to do this more often. Voices for Justice was an event which brought together reflection on Scripture, prayer, praise to God with a passion for justice and public witness in a way that is all too rare but takes us beyond the secular/sacred split that has deprived Christian witness of its power and integrity.

Following Jesus in a time of violence

In the light, or should I say darkness of current events, of the Middle East, the shared commitment of all major state and non-state actors to the assumption that the application of military power will resolve the issues it is hard for Christians committed to peace-making, to follow the radical call of Jesus to know where and how to engage in the public discussion.

Perhaps we can only begin by reminding the Christian community of a couple of fundamental convictions. Let me quote extracts from a recent statement that I was involved in drafting, *“Following Jesus in a World of Deception, Violence and Fear.”*

Our first loyalty

A Christian’s first loyalty is to God, revealed in Jesus Christ. This loyalty is expressed by belonging to the church, the multi-ethnic ‘body of Christ’ spread throughout the world. Loyalty to God has priority over loyalty to one’s nation, government or racial group. ‘We must obey God rather than human authority’ (Acts 5:29).

For this reason, we do not accept that claims of national or ethnic identity, let alone concerns for ‘national security’, supersede our loyalty to God. Nor do they override our responsibility to make the moral vision of Jesus real in our world.

Waging peace

Jesus’ call to peacemaking commits Christians to the presumption that warfare is wrong. This commitment is strengthened by the devastating reality of war and its impact, not only on those who are paid to fight, but also on innocent families and communities as well as our fragile environment. Christians have a responsibility to be honest about the costs of war, to explore peaceful alternatives, to act on behalf of victims and to work for justice and reconciliation. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be known as the children of God’ (Matthew 5:9).

For this reason, we join with those who oppose government policies based on the assumption that ‘war on terror’ overrides human rights and the rule of law. Certain measures can never be condoned – torture, bombing of civilians and the use of weapons of mass destruction.

The full statement is on the AAANZ web site. I encourage you to print it out and use it as a point of discussion with friends whether they are committed to following Jesus or not. It provides a useful point of engagement and was signed by Christian leaders from a variety of traditions. That such a diverse group of Christians was willing to sign the statement was encouraging as the underlying commitments were powerfully shaped by an Anabaptist understanding of the Call to follow Jesus.

For the prayers, conversation and support of everyone through the AAANZ network during my time as an interim president, thanks.

Voices for Justice Down Under DOUG HYN

Parliament House Canberra in mid-October witnessed Christian action that brought together, worship, the arts and solid research on how to tackle poverty in a challenge to political business as usual, in Australia’s national capital. Amanda Jackson, the national coordinator for Micah Challenge in Australia was excited with the Micah Challenge’s *Voices for Justice* initiative during Anti-Poverty Week. One hundred and thirty Christians from all denominations and all parts of the country gathered in the capital to prayerfully and positively call our leaders to tackle the devastating impact of global poverty. Her report captures the flavour of an event which highlights the increasingly “movement’ character of Christian social engagement.

The *Voices for Justice* initiative brought together people from across Australia to reflect the call of the prophet Micah to combine justice, kindness and righteousness. The three day program organised by Micah Challenge was a mix of worship, prayer, learning and action – the gospel in all its fullness. The action that attracted the attention of politicians during Anti-Poverty Week was the presence of around 130 “ordinary prophets” who wanted to thank MPs for what has already been achieved and remind all parties that more needs to be done if we are to meet the global target of halving poverty by 2015. This target is the overall aim of the Millennium Development Goals – eight measurable goals that echo the Bible’s concern for the poor.

It was an exciting experience for a farming couple from Queensland, Alan and Lesley Hughes. “We’ve always sponsored kids,” said Mrs. Hughes, “even before our own kids were born. But more recently we’d heard about the idea of ‘standing in the gap’ for someone—like Jesus did for us. We wanted to ‘stand in the gap’ and speak up for those who aren’t able to speak for themselves.”

The Hughes were dairy farmers, but now sell fodder to larger producers. “Despite the hardships that we’ve faced with dairy deregulation and the drought, we know that we are far better off than the 1.1 billion around the world living in extreme poverty,” said Mr. Hughes.

Students from a Wycliffe College west of Sydney also traveled to *Voices for Justice*. They’ve started an advocacy group at their school, called Just Act. Stephanie Azzopardi, Year 11, is the group’s new leader, and *Voices for Justice* has left her excited about continuing to keep the issues of poverty on the government and society’s agenda. “I wanted to come so that I could learn heaps more, and take it back to the school. We want to tell everyone what it’s all about.”

“We need to try and get people to think of what it would be like to be in extreme poverty,” said Chloe Stuit, Year 9. “Everyone deserves justice.”

“This is an issue that Christians all over Australia care about,” said Carlyn Chen, coordinator of the *Voices for Justice* events. “I’m delighted that so many people came—it’s very empowering to visit your MP, and exciting to know that we can have a voice.”

The service on Sunday evening that started the three days of *Voices for Justice* was a reminder that poverty is a spiritual issue as well as an economic and social problem. Amanda Jackson, National Coordinator of Micah Challenge commented, “When Gideon went to battle against the Midianites, God reduced his army to only 300 men to remind him that the battle was God’s. We have 130 people in Canberra and we need to rely totally on God’s power if we are to have an impact.” The music, drama and preaching that evening located the task of speaking truth to power within the context of the call to discipleship.

Over 70 politicians heard about the challenges of poverty and injustice and many commented that they had already heard of Micah Challenge because of letters sent by local Christians. “It is the combination of prayer, words and actions that will bring change,” says Amanda Jackson and *Voices for Justice* is an important part of that process.

The *Voices for Justice* group participated with 19 politicians from the Federal Parliament and a number of

people from Christian communities in Canberra in the Stand Up Against Poverty event on the lawns of Parliament House. The story of what happened next when some members of the *Voices for Justice* group went to enter Parliament House on their way to visit politicians casts an interesting sidelight on the climate of fear now pervading our democratic institutions and became the subject of a statement on the floor of the Senate by NSW Senator Ursula Stephens. Senator Bartlett the Australian Democrat Senator reported the statement on his weblog <http://www.andrewbartlett.com/blog/>.

“About 25 young people from that group [Voices for Justice] then entered the building through the front entrance of Parliament House for appointments with 70 MPs and senators... Mr. President, are you aware that the security officers immediately confiscated all their materials, informing them that what they were bringing into the building was ‘protest material’ and therefore prohibited? Mr. President, I would like to show you what the protest material was. It hardly passes as prohibited material. Included were the posters, the Make Poverty History response to the aid white paper, manila folders containing maps of Parliament House, contact details of members or senators they were to meet, posters of the UN millennium goals, constituent letters to be personally handed to members of parliament and postcards about an art exhibition in Parliament House that day.

I was one of the 19 federal parliamentarians, including the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Beazley, and members and senators who are here today, to proudly take part in that Stand Up event and to welcome the Micah Challenge group to parliament. I was therefore deeply disturbed to learn of their treatment. When informed that it was not a protest and that they had meetings with 70 MPs, the security official’s response was to inform them that if the MPs wanted the materials they could come down individually and collect them. It took at least half an hour of questioning before the security officer called for a higher level supervisor to meet the group.

Eventually the organisers of the event were able to persuade the supervisor that the event had already been approved by security weeks in advance and that there was no threat in allowing the young people to proceed with the materials. By this time, much inconvenience had been caused as some meetings had had to continue without the materials and others had been delayed... Mr President, who defines what constitutes protest materials? Is it assumed that events that take place on the front lawns automatically constitute a protest? Why were these young people intimidated in this way? How is it determined that some groups can bring material into this building and not others? Mr. President, can you please ensure that these young people receive an official apology for what was appalling treatment?”

Senator Bartlett commented: *“I actually heard something of this around the time it was happening. I did offer to go down to help sort it out but was told it would be OK. When I heard their experiences baldly recounted in the Senate today, it made me wish I had done more about it at the time. I am rather overcome with ‘outrage fatigue’ these days, as each day brings new examples of arrogance,*

ignorance and contempt for the Parliament, democracy and the public across a whole range of new frontiers. The effect is that each new outrage tends to just be added to an ever growing list, and the hot anger slowly replaced by ever-louder sighs and lamentations for the fate of democracy.”

Remembering those who do not have a voice

DOUG HYND

A community initiative, with strong support from Christian churches across Australia, sought to ensure that the loss of life of over 350 asylum seekers in the sinking of the SIEV X on 19 October 2001 would not be forgotten. SIEVX is the acronym for ‘Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel X’ (the X stands for ‘unknown’). It is the name by which Australians have come to know the nameless, dilapidated, criminally overloaded Indonesian fishing boat that sank en route to Australia’s Christmas Island on 19 October 2001.

Five years after the sinking of SIEVX, the largest maritime disaster in the region of Australia since World War 2, on a sunny Sunday afternoon on 15 October, a memorial event to remember this sinking was staged in Canberra on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. The memorial featured individually decorated timber poles held up by mourners to signify each of the victims. Over 1,000 people gathered to signify solidarity with those who are still grieving the loss of families and friends, and to assert the need to speak the truth about this event, a truth that the Australian government has been unwilling to have exposed to public view.

This moving event presented Mr. al-Ghazzi with the chance to give way to the grief welling since the boat sank en route from Indonesia to Christmas Island on October 19, 2001. Mr. al-Ghazzi, a native Iraqi, has no family in his adopted home of Perth. In the place of his family at the ceremony were two of his Australian friends, Sue Hoffman and Vanessa Moss. Alongside them were a handful of other fathers who lost family in the disaster, as well as around two thousand people from around the country so moved by their plight they have joined the fight to create a permanent memorial in Canberra. **The Canberra Times**, the only mainstream media source to take note of the event, reported that:

“Worn out by five years of pent-up pain, Mohammad al-Ghazzi grasped the opportunity yesterday to cry for his family members lost in the 2001 sinking of the wooden boat SIEV-X, which was crammed with asylum-seekers. Mr al-Ghazzi’s wife, three children and 10 more relatives were among the 353 Iraqis and Afghans who died on their way to what they had hoped would be a new life in Australia.”

The organisers of the SIEV-X Memorial Ceremony and Raising of the Poles hope that it will help create that legacy. Whether that wish materialises or not, the temporary tribute injected new strength into Mr. al-Ghazzi. “This is the first time I have been able to grieve for my family,” he said. I am so tired by all that has

happened; I am still looking for the truth.” He has been granted permanent residency, but has yet to find a job.

One of the founders of the movement to establish a permanent memorial for the SIEVX, the Reverend Rod Horsfield, of the Uniting Church, said the memorial was needed out of respect for the victims.

The campaign has so far been unsuccessful because of the rules regarding the establishment of a permanent memorial in Canberra using the decorated poles. The rules apparently dictate that at least ten years must have passed since an event before a permanent memorial to it is made. The question has been raised as to whether or not the unwillingness to approve a permanent memorial by the national planning authority may be connected with the Australian Government’s policy of “demonising” asylum seekers for political purposes over the past five years.

About 250 schools, churches, Rotary Clubs and Country Women’s Associations made the poles and wrote on them the name of the person they had chosen to remember, if known.

Steve Biddulph, a member of the Uniting church and a popular author on family life and social change made the following comments at the event:

“We’ve been through a dark time in the past ten years. We have gone down a path of fear, reacting to the world from our basest values, clutching at our possessions and our privilege, like little Gollums afraid our precious would be taken from us. We have tragically refused to respond lovingly to a world of need around us. Our leadership has sensed the power fear holds over us and exploited it shamelessly.”

It was an international disgrace when we sent soldiers with guns to a group of people who needed nurses and doctors. We’ve allowed the horrific mistreatment of vulnerable parents and tiny children in the remote places of detention – years of misery and irreversible harm. And for nothing. At the worst moment of all we allowed through neglect or intent these hundreds of innocent lives to choke and die in the black night time waters of our northern seas. In the tragedy of the SIEVX we reaped what our fears had sown.

The SIEVX Memorial is a response that comes directly from the Christian values our country is supposed to be based on. It affirms what all spiritual leaders have taught from Jesus to Ghandi and King. It refuses to live out of fear. It refuses to put selfishness first. The SIEVX memorial is from the true heart of ordinary Australians.

The SIEVX memorial responds to darkness with creativity, and to isolation with love. The outpouring of creativity and care and effort from thousands of young Australians as well as parents, teachers, churches, refugee groups, Amnesty groups, Rotary clubs and rural towns says one simple powerful thing. Love is stronger than fear. At a time when it is so badly needed these young Australians are turning to love instead of the cramped dreary grasping of our leaders. There is a new spirit rising in our land and not a moment to soon.

(For further details on the sinking of SIEVX, links to further resources and the attempts to penetrate to the truth of what actually happened, and the questions on the role and responsibility of the Australian Government the following websites provide a helpful start: <http://sievx.com/>; <http://www.sievxmemorial.com/>)

Ekklesia

DOUG HYND

That the old denominational dividing lines are less important than they used to be can be found in an increasing recognition that the movement beyond the old Christendom merging of church and state is the critical issue facing Christians.

One of the most helpful resources on thinking through the issues that follow from this reality is a series of books currently being published by Paternoster Press. See the website: www.postchristendom.com for information on the books that have been published so far.

The other resource that I have found useful is the Ekklesia web site www.ekklesia.co.uk a web site that promotes radical theological ideas in public life and that has been substantially influenced by the Anabaptist tradition.

The following press release highlights the themes of a recent paper from Ekklesia on Christian engagement in public policy.

Christian think tank says government should stop propping up religion -25/07/06

A UK think tank has said that the present situation where churches seek government support in areas like education, and government uses faith groups to prop up its own social agenda, is unhealthy for all concerned. In a new discussion paper for both religious and secular opinion formers, Ekklesia argues that the demise of 'Christendom' in the West creates a positive new opportunity for faith groups to welcome genuine pluralism in public institutions – and to demonstrate radical alternatives in an "often acquisitive, violent, confused and atomized society".

The document, 'Redeeming Religion in the Public Square', is available on Ekklesia's website. It summarises and extends arguments from the newly published book 'Faith and Politics After Christendom'.

Ekklesia challenges the popular idea that the only kinds of religion possible are either domineering ones or watered down varieties. It says that a renewal of generous faith, not its reduction, is the best way of 'redeeming religion' from within – and enabling it to discover a positive, though not always unthreatening, role in society.

Both the paper and the book focus their arguments on Christianity in Britain, but highlight questions and challenges for other faith communities and for humanists or those of no religious affiliation. 'Redeeming Religion in the Public Square' says that angry displays of self-assertion from some religious groups (over shows like Jerry Springer The Opera) are not signs of strength, but of underlying weakness. This is because, Ekklesia argues, Britain has seen an irreversible cultural and political shift away from "mutually reinforcing relationship between church and government" in recent years. What we are now seeing is a backlash against this.

The think tank says that these new attempts by faith groups to use the state to coerce others into accepting their norms and values is wrong and counterproductive – for religious reasons, as well as for political ones.

Ekklesia argues that Christianity has been corrupted by its easy alliance with the status quo, that faith cannot be

imposed on a reluctant majority, and that 'the new deal' between government and religious groups on education and public services raises serious issues of integrity, justice and human rights.

'Redeeming Religion in the Public Square' says that the government needs to adopt a stance of 'interested neutrality' to matters of faith – instead of either privileging religion or adopting the negative form of secularity seen in France.

It argues that Christian churches and organisations, in particular, can embrace a more marginal status in society as an opportunity to rediscover the levelling message of Jesus. This approach is one of "witness, not control" (demonstrating alternatives rather than seeking power for ourselves). 'Redeeming Religion in the Public Square' outlines 14 areas where this is possible, including active peacemaking, hospitality towards migrants, restorative justice, involvement in anti-poverty alliances and the development of non-confrontational approaches to controversial bioethical issues.

In the same way, the think tank argues that to free up faith and encourage a genuine level-playing-field in public life the time has come to scrap blasphemy laws, to end the establishment of the Church of England, and to stop using religious affiliation as a means of selection in state schools.

Comments Ekklesia co-director Simon Barrow, who wrote the discussion paper: "Politicians cannot ignore religion, and faith cannot be shut away from public life. So what we need is radical new thinking about religion and politics, both by government and all those who want alternatives to 'toxic religion' which tries to justify violence and domination in the name of God."

Further reading: Redeeming Religion in the Public Square 24 July 2006. A ground-breaking approach to faith and politics from Ekklesia; *Faith And Politics After Christendom: The Church As A Movement for Anarchy* by Jonathan Bartley (Paternoster Press, 2006); *Change faith versus politics standoff, says Christian think tank; God and the politicians: a response to David Aaronovitch's BBC2 documentary; Subverting the manifestos: A Christian agenda for change* (UK general election 2005). Also a news service, *Ekklesia advocates progressive Christian ideas in public life, runs the ISP www.peacenik.co.uk, is a partner in the Westminster Forum, explores the intersection of theology and politics, and last year raised £130,000 for peace and justice causes.*

The FOCaL Conference 2006

The FOCaL Conference 2006, "Church and Society after Election 2005," was held June 30 - July 1st at Central Baptist Church in Wellington. The media release for the conference said "In the lead up to last election one would be forgiven for thinking that the church's primary role in society was to complain. Particularly to complain about the sexual practices of others and legislation that gave protection to people who choose a lifestyle other than that authorised by the traditional church values. The Christian voice in New Zealand is far broader than that of the so called 'moral right.' We have a heritage of promoting social justice and working for a fair society where all are protected

and ensured the right to live with freedom of conscience. A number of Christian leaders expressed disdain that in the lead up to last election complex issues were portrayed as simple black and white decisions, healthy debate was sidelined and the voice of progressive Christianity was not heard at all. The Hikoi of Hope in 1998 was where the phrase enough is enough was voiced to make a stand for positive action to alleviate poverty and ensure a just society for all. In 2005 the same phrase was chanted by a march on parliament with a much narrower vision of church's role in society. It's time the voice of the church was heard again in full resonance – we need to talk about ways that the church and government can work together for the common good.”

FOCaL - Forum of the Christian Left (www.focal.org.nz) – planned the conference to bring members of parliament and Christian leaders together to begin a process of dialogue about key issues ranging from social justice, the environment, taxation, peace issues and employment. The conference was co-sponsored by the Victoria University Religious Studies Department and all conference papers have been published by *Stimulus: the*

New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice, Vol 14, Issue 3, August 2006 (<http://www.stimulus.org.nz/>).

In this issue we feature an edited version of Anthony Dancer's FOCaL Conference paper "Towards a Just Society" and the first half of Chris Marshall's Paper "A Prophet of God's Justice: Reclaiming the Political Jesus." The second half will appear in the March 2007 issue of **ON THE ROAD**.

The Revd Dr Anthony Dancer is the Social Justice Commissioner of the Anglican Church in New Zealand and Dr Chris Marshall is St John's Senior Lecturer in Christian Theology, Religious Studies Programme, Victoria University of Wellington.



Chris Marshall (l) and Anthony Dancer (r) at Restorative Justice Conference, NZ, November 2004

Towards a Just Society

ANTHONY DANCER

The historical norms of historical engagement of church and state suggest that it might be most appropriate for me to offer an analysis of (some) the many injustices that face us at this time (e.g. Foreshore & Seabed and seabed mining, environment, GPI, contraction and convergence, employment, low pay, child poverty, land use, access to health and wellbeing, water etc.), and seek to propose ways in which the church and the politicians may interact around policies and practices (and perhaps speak about the government initiatives that have been put in place largely by virtue of the Church's voice being heard). This kind of presentation is something I am uneasy about providing here. It presumes too much of both parties.

My unease concerns presumptions, underlying structures, the way in which economic discourse has replaced political (values based) discourse as foundationally normative in our political life, and the possibility of being unable to distinguish ourselves and our mission from it.

The New Zealand political scene until the 1980s was largely an expression of attempts at interventionism in various guises – what historian Michael Bassett has described as "jerry built economic structures."¹ Amidst this, the dominant historical form of engagement that the church (especially the Anglican Church) had with the state was what one might very *loosely* term "partner" or "co-worker" towards common aims.

When, in the 1980s, the walls of politics in this country came, more or less, tumbling down, a new politics was born. This was a form of governance in which politics, essentially, was replaced by economics as the *normative and foundational* means through which society was organised. This created major social upheaval almost overnight, and naturally the effects can still be felt today.²

The institutional church's self-understanding of its role, formally and informally in this country has been one of helping to shape a more 'humane' and 'fair' society wherever it can. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with that. However, broadly speaking it hasn't fundamentally changed the way it does this a great deal in the last 20 years (or beyond), and at an institutional level I doubt it will change substantially in the very near future.

There are many factors at work in this, but one of most notable contributing factors to this 'quietism' and perhaps the emergence of FOCaL, can be seen in the way in which recent labour Governments have 'softened' the more abrasive characteristics of traditional neoliberal policies. It is asserted by some that through this 'softening' they have begun to deliver a new social democratic 'Third Way'. However, as Brian Roper observes "By softening the neoliberal policy regime slightly while leaving the hard core of this policy regime firmly in place, the Government has successfully blunted popular anger and deflected resistance to the central features of this regime. Furthermore, the Government has presented these features of the neoliberal regime as generally accepted foundations for growth and innovation, rather than areas of policy that have been, and continue to be, hotly contested by intellectuals and political forces in the wider society."³

Consequently, while as the church we have certainly achieved some positive outcomes these last twenty years in the face of some of the most severe injustices, we have also struggled to maintain a voice which is distinct, long lived, and authentically faithful to the Gospel. The risk, it seems to me, is that in the search for authentic and 'meaningful' (often misunderstood as 'relevant') discourse, we become (unwittingly) coopted into the dominant (economic) discourse of the day. As a result,

somehow or other, we seem stuck, adrift from our political moorings to the Gospel. And we remain 'stuck' in this 'co-worker' relationship with the state.

I question this notion of being a 'co-worker' with the State as the primary form of faithful conduct, which we seem to justify through the outcomes it achieves. I wonder whether, ultimately, as a 'partner'/'co-worker' with the state, we are destined to become nothing more than an agent of the state (e.g. witness, for instance, social service delivery), and it seems to me this has no valid place or justification within the politically radical Gospel of Jesus Christ. For too long, the church has served predominantly as *chaplain* to the state and more recently to capitalism⁴ – seeking to try and maintain its 'partner' or 'co-worker' role.

Yet amidst this the title I was given for this talk seems both presumptuous, and perhaps also hopeful. It seems to presume we can move towards a just society – that there is this 'thing' or 'value' called 'justice'. To my mind, it presumes something lost in so much of contemporary politics: it presumes a priority of ethics (i.e. how we act) over economics (i.e. how we use money) as normative for how we order a society (i.e. politics).

So, there is a statement being made about this

thing called *justice*. That is a good and hopeful thing.

However, my cautionary note to this would be that there can often be an

overstatement of what we might hope to actually

achieve. Do we, for instance,

ever presume we can *attain* this thing called a just society in New Zealand? Do we presume left wing politics will provide the answer? Or do we engage in our journey, aware of our limitations at the outset?

I want to look at three things, and reflect upon them with you. They are, I should stress, reflections not conclusions. Firstly, I would like to look at the relationship of ethics (action) and economics (money/resources) in contemporary politics (order/organisation), and its relationship to justice; secondly, the place of the church in all this, and what kind of voice it might have; and thirdly, whether there is hope left in 'The Left', and if so what this might look like.

Ethics and Economics in Contemporary Politics

In the election last year many chose to vote for the Green and Māori parties. Now this is a case study, not party political advocacy. I believe it is worth looking at these two parties for a moment to see what appeared distinctive to people.

Green and Māori have been noted as being the only two parties which do not place economics, and especially neo-liberal economics, at the centre of their political life. Instead, they place kaupapa [vision] and values or ethics at the centre, and their economic policies service these kaupapa and values.

For the Green and Māori parties, it would therefore seem that how we act, what we do and how we are organised (in other words, our politics) are not shaped primarily by the market and economics. Instead, they are

shaped by economic policies that strategically serve the kaupapa and values of the party in order to create the kind of society they want us to live. As I've noted, that is something lost on much modern parliamentary discourse. Both parties seem to promote a politics in which, to paraphrase Gerrard Winstanly, money is no longer the great god that hedges in some and hedges out others.

In many ways, this is what left wing politics has traditionally been about. So it is perhaps notable that both these two parties speak from the margins or the fringes of the political and cultural landscape. That is not to downplay their importance; quite the opposite I hope for us, given the significance of the margins in our Christian faith. But it is to note theirs is not the dominant view.

Despite the dominant structural economic rhetoric, there are alternative discourses being had in politics. In addition, it is worth noting that these kinds of discourses are also occurring amongst individuals in other parties. I've picked upon the Māori and Green parties specifically because of their clear and deliberate organisational stance. They touch on something that I believe also drives what has been called "The Christian Left", for although they may use different language, they express a desire for a politics

of *authenticity* in the face of *alienation* or *disenfranchisement*.

I am not sure how a just society, or an authentic society, can be attained so long as we remain beguiled by the domination of neo-

liberal economics as that which has the first and last word in determining our politics, because this ultimately determines justice and our authenticity through the competition of the market and views humans as both capital and commodities to which value is added or taken away. As human beings, there is more to us than this.

The place of the Christian and the voice of the church.

As I think about our present situation, and the stirring amongst Christians who see the world differently and desire authenticity in politics and economics, I am reminded of the New Left, which emerged on the scene of 1960s radicalism in the United States. It offers some interesting points of connection. Despite lasting for only one decade, more or less, the New Left plays a crucial role in American political history. Historian Alan Brinkley makes this point well:

"For a brief moment in the 1960s, a small group of student radicals managed to do what the American left had largely failed to achieve in almost a century of trying: create a genuine mass movement...Its history is important ...not only for how student radicalism ultimately went wrong, but also for how that radicalism emerged and briefly flourished."⁵

It's this status as a mass movement of political radicalism which flourished and went astray which interests me in particular. The emergence of the New Left has been closely linked by historian Doug Rossinow to Christian

I am not sure how a just society, or an authentic society, can be attained so long as we remain beguiled by the domination of neo-liberal economics...

Radicalism,⁶ and emerged out of an intentional Christian Community known as the Christian Faith and Life Community (CFLC), which was based in Texas.

The CFLC emerged as an evangelical community in the early 1950s, and was modelled upon the founder's experiences of Iona and his reading about Bonhoeffer's underground seminary – in fact, Bonhoeffer's theology was central to the community's life together. Predominantly a student community, it was fuelled by a desire for authenticity amidst a personal and political experience of alienation – a response fuelled in part by existentialist thinking of the time.

The 1950s in America were times that were pregnant with optimism at the chance of breaking free of the chains of alienation, and existentialism was seen by many as the key to this hope. Existentialism in and of itself did not imply any kind of political engagement, however it seems history worked to bring existentialism to feed an emerging radical humanism, which in turn would eventually fuel the search for authenticity and democracy. "To the combustible chemistry of this historical moment Christian existentialism contributed the hope of breaking through to a new world where young people might find a new, authentic life"⁷.

The essence of this Christian existentialist hope was that one might turn away from anxiety and towards authenticity, if one made oneself open to risk, or, to use the adopted symbolism, if one became more like Christ. The movement brought the "legacy of the earlier social gospel movement into the cold-war era and expressed an unusually spirited dissent from the prevailing conservative trend of the 1950s,"⁸ and Christ became a symbol of openness to risk and extremity. This risk and extremity manifest in political organising and action. Therefore, the CFLC represented the politicisation of a personal desire – it reached out for a reality beyond the personal and immediate towards the corporate. It did this out of its corporate community life – these were people in pursuit of authenticity *together*.

The New Left which ultimately emerged was predominantly a movement of radicalism, seeking freedom and authenticity, and taking forward the leftist agenda well beyond where it had been previously in post-war America. Its members dreamt of changing themselves by changing society.

Ultimately, the New Left exchanged the "inner alienation they had bemoaned for the outer alienation they had admired"⁹. They failed to broaden the constituency from the young white middle class, failed to develop the organisational skills to build a movement that would endure, and so became alienated from the rest of society and 'died'.

In telling the story, it seems to me there are a number of things to ponder.

Constituency

Members of the CFLC and the New Left were predominantly young people. Their age and outlook no doubt contributed to their zeal and engagement, and their willingness to identify positively with risk and extremity. These risks contributed directly to the development of the

movement. As we grow older, our outlook changes, and we see and engage the world differently. The failure of the New Left to develop its constituency beyond itself was a factor in its demise. Lessons would seem to abound for the church, including its constituency, normative and sustainable practice, and the development of its constituency beyond itself.

Context

Our context is characterised by a break down of the norms that we once took for granted. This has been positive in some ways, and highly destructive in others. This is a situation in many ways similar to the social upheaval of the 1960s. Politically there is perhaps a sense of alienation and discontentment experienced not only by those who have a more leftist gaze, but also amongst those who find themselves at the bottom of the economic or social hierarchy. The way in which the New Left arose out of, and engaged with their context is a timely reminder that movements are not so much created as born. Does the institutional church have a role as midwife, I wonder?

Our context is such that we are living in an economic system whose rhetoric offers 'self-determination' to 'everyone' (freedom through economics). Yet we are only too well aware that this is actually far from the case; we sense a ring of unauthenticity to the language. There is a desire by some to 'recover' the authenticity that has been lost – but we need to be careful about harking back to a bygone era which perhaps never existed, and instead think more carefully about how to bring our resources to bear upon engaging where we are right now.

Movement

Ultimately, the New Left collapsed. It alienated itself from the rest of society, and hadn't nurtured the organisational skills to endure. But at its climax, it was a radical mass movement with origins in Christian radicalism. Was it a voice for the season? And if so, I wonder what lessons we may learn for our own season, now? Are there, as I suspect there are, roles for the institutional church and the church as a movement to play together, whereby the institution provides the longevity whilst the movement provides the much needed engagement? If so, would this allow the Christian voice to emerge with a frequency and persistence previously unknown as a 'prophetic voice for a season' in a way which is more robust, fearless, and faithful? And would it mean the church would be less inclined to try and create society in its own institutional image (a practice which harks back to a lost 'Christendom')? Would there be scope for church to be born, rather than created (or planted), as a prophetic and political voice?

Community

The centrality of community to the rise of the New Left and its flourishing, and the origins of that community in Christianity, are also significant. As Christians it is primarily in community that we seek to practice living as a just society. Authenticity comes through communities as *movement* rather than *institutions* because movements have an ad-hoc engaged quality about them that take their

context seriously, institutions have an entirely different dynamic.

The church as a movement is a church in which being just, and living justly, is the normative ethic which shapes all else, and this practice emerges directly out of being in relationship and community with others. At the heart of this relationship is worship.¹⁰ Radicalism requires relationship, as does the justice that results.

This radical involvement is the basis for living justly towards a just society. This 'just society' is first and foremost not something applied to wider society, but something lived as the 'True Society', or what we might otherwise name as the church (in worship).

I'd like to conclude this section by describing the characteristics of this kind of radical Christian involvement which we might call the *ethics of involvement*. To do so, I draw upon the work of William Stringfellow.¹¹ The Christian life is characterised by:

Realism

The Christian regards the actual day-to-day existence of the world realistically, and takes it seriously. Living in freedom from the power of Death, the Christian is the bluntest and relentless realist, able to face the world as it is without flinching, fear, surprise, embarrassment, sentimentality, guile or disguise. The Christian is free to live in the world *as it is*.

Inconsistency

In faithfulness to the Gospel, the Christian will always appear inconsistent to others in public views and opinions. This is as it should be, because the Christian is non-ideological in politics. Although the Christian acts for this or that cause in society, she doesn't do it as the servant of some race, ideological agenda, or political system, but out of freedom from such idols.

Radicalism

The Christian is never satisfied. The stance of the Christian is perpetually in a position of dissent about the status quo, whatever it happens to be (that's why we need to be weary of identifying too strongly with any political ideology, left or right). The only axe the Christian has to grind is that of authentic community or just society in the midst of injustice and unauthenticity. We hold the state to account. We are aliens, standing in protest. At no time should we confuse the nation and its attainments with the Kingdom of God.

Intercession

We are concerned politically for everyone. The characteristic sign of the inclusiveness and extremity of our concern is expressed and embodied in our specific care for those who are least in society, those ignored, forgotten or cast out and abandoned. But also we must embrace the 'enemy' – those who we may oppose – or those who would oppose us and deny the freedom of our

witness. Ultimately, it means demonstrating the true society to the world by the living example of the society of the church as a movement, in which our work is worship. That is at the heart of the Christian political witness. Political witness is fundamentally a spiritual discipline.

FOCaL and the Future

Is there a future for "leftism" and FOCaL? Only time will tell. However, I think it's a welcome initiative. I would like to see a balance being restored to faith and politics in this country, which compelled and nurtured the voice of dissent and protest from the margins, at least as much as we have fostered the 'partnership' or 'co-worker' models of the past.

It is not good enough for us to serve as a chaplain to either capitalism or to society, and we've generally gotten away with perfecting this way of behaving for too long. If there is something we need to recover, it's a faithful radicalism in which we are co-workers with Christ, akin to the *ethics of involvement* above, and that is essentially all about the recovery of a spiritual discipline as the basis of justice.

If we are going to move towards a just society, we

It is not good enough for us to serve as a chaplain to either capitalism or to society, and we've generally gotten away with perfecting this way of behaving for too long.

need that radical and faithful voice. That means locating ourselves not in the centre of power, but at the margins. I believe Intentional Christian Communities offer hope, and I wonder if they might

play a central part of any radical movement. Intentional communities remind us of the spiritual imperative to political authenticity through their life and practice. They offer us a way of being authentic that affects people's lives on the margins of our society. They embody much of what it means to be a 'just society'.

The future is literally in the margins, for this is the context where we find the ideas and actions that are most generative of transformation – this is where most risk is taken, and where hope is born. It seems to me that's a lesson learnt in the contemporary politics of the Green and Māori parties.

The margins are also the place where we find ourselves in solidarity with those who are dispossessed, disenfranchised, isolated and poor. These are situations and people from which we have a great deal to learn, if we have ears to listen. The relationship of standing-with and speaking-with, rather than working-for and speaking-for, is not to be underestimated, and neither is its complexity.

Ultimately (and this I think is a positive thing for FOCaL and the church) there is hope to be found in the voice of discontent and dissent because it's not the last word, but simply a radically faithful obedience to the Jesus Christ and the justice of the Kingdom. In other words, it's an act of worship.

Ultimately we are not determined and driven by economics or ideologies, but justice. If leftist politics can provide a way of furthering *that* agenda for us at this time and in this place, then the more involvement and support the church can engage it with, and the more radical and faithful our voice and action can become, the better. For, ultimately, that is what our freedom requires of us.

The real measure of a just society is whether we are prepared to speak out and act according to our conscience, no matter what the consequences may be, even when it ultimately means failure (as of course it always will in the world's eyes, given the provisional nature of the Church as a fore-taste of the Kingdom). This way of living is nothing other than the faithfulness of the Christian life: a life of worship, a life of authentic freedom.

We see this authentic freedom emerging from time to time in history, and it gives us hope. So, I finish by leaving you with a quote from Gerrard Winstanley, the architect of another failed radical movement known as The Diggers, along with the thought that there is, and always has been, a future and hope in the margins, and in faith, that is where we are to be found. Writing shortly after the Civil War, Winstanley wrote:

“All people have stood for freedom... and now the common enemy has gone you are all like men in a mist, seeking for freedom and know not where nor what it is: and those of the richer sort of you that see it are ashamed and afraid to own it, because it comes clothed in a clownish garment.... For freedom is the man that will turn the world upside down, therefore no wonder he hath enemies...if thou consent to freedom for the rich in the City and givest freedom to the freeholders in the country, and to priests and lawyers and lords of manors.... and yet allowest the poor no freedom, thou art a declared hypocrite.”¹²

¹ Michael Bassett, *The State in New Zealand 1840-1984: Socialism without Doctrines?* Auckland University Press, 1998.

² For an excellent account of economic, social and political change see Brian Roper *Prosperity for All? Economic, Social and Political Change in New Zealand since 1935*, Thompson, 2005.

³ Roper, *Prosperity for All?*, p. 237. Roper goes on to note that the gap between rich and poor continues to grow, and there is little sign of it narrowing through present policy direction.

⁴ See Michael Budde and Robert Brimlow *Christianity Incorporated: How Big Business is Buying the Church* Grand

Rapids: Brazos, 2002, and Allan Davidson “Chaplain to the Nation or Prophet at the Gate? The Role of the Church in New Zealand Society.” In *Christianity, Modernity and Culture: New Perspectives on New Zealand History*, edited by John Stenhouse, assisted by G.A. Wood, 311-31. Adelaide: ATF, 2005.

⁵ Alan Brinkley *Liberalism and its Discontents* Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998, p.222.

⁶ Doug Rossinow *The Politics of Authenticity: Christianity and the New Left in America*, Columbia University Press, 1998.

⁷ *Politics of Authenticity* p.55

⁸ *Politics of Authenticity* p.6.

⁹ *Politics of Authenticity* p.19.

¹⁰ Worship is the basis of our knowing (anything at all), and worship is our work (and work is our worship in the world). It is at the heart of mission. Therefore, worship as our response to God's love for us is the basis and process of our knowing and acting. It is the basis for and means by which we work out justice in any given time and place. Why worship? Christian knowledge that is meaningful is primarily practical knowing-in-response that is knowledge in, for and with God, not about or of God; it is knowing-as-action-in-response *together*, in relation to 'the other'. It is only ever this kind of knowledge that can be called 'just'. Justice is not a set of principles to be applied, so much as truth revealed in the living. Therefore, justice-knowledge is transformative knowledge, and is not a set of principles to be established and applied and worship is the context of truth and revelation – it is our just work in the community. Justice, therefore, is fundamentally a *spiritual discipline*.

¹¹ See William Stringfellow *Dissenter in a Great Society*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966, pp. 156-164. Stringfellow has been described as the most significant American lay theologians of the 20th Century. He is responsible for recovering the theology of the principalities and powers for American theology. For more about Stringfellow see Anthony Dancer (ed) William Stringfellow in *Anglo-American Perspective* Ashgate, 2005. See also <http://www.wipfandstock.com> for reprints of his books.

¹² Gerrard Winstanley, *A Watch-Word to the City of London and the Armie*, August 1649. See also Andrew Bradstock and Christopher Rowland (eds) *Radical Christian Writings: A Reader* Blackwell, 2002.

A Prophet of God's Justice: Reclaiming the Political Jesus

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INTRODUCTION:

In this paper I want to offer an appraisal of some of the political themes that emerge in the gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus. My thesis is radically simple (as well as simply radical) – it is that Jesus was an overtly political figure, that he had an identifiable political platform, and that the political values, commitments and priorities we see displayed in his teaching and praxis ought to play a determinative role in shaping and directing all subsequent Christian engagement in the political process.

So the proposal itself is quite simple. But it is also, in truth, quite radical. It is radical because it contradicts the conventional view of Jesus as a thoroughly *apolitical* figure, someone who had no interest in, perhaps even an antipathy towards, political activity. According to the usual view, Jesus came as a *spiritual* saviour, not a political activist. He proclaimed a *heavenly* kingdom, not a worldly kingdom. He was concerned with the salvation of *souls*, not with the transformation of society. He called for *personal* righteousness, not for political change. He may well have

had a theology (after all he talked about God a lot), and possibly even an ethics (consider the Sermon on the Mount), but he certainly didn't have a politics (he had nothing to say about the role of the State, and little more about the state of society).

We are all familiar with this way of thinking. It is taken for granted by many sincere Christians, especially in conservative churches, and is firmly entrenched in the popular imagination as well. A non-political Jesus has been a basic tenet of both Christian piety and a good deal of standard biblical scholarship for a very long time. Preachers and scholars alike have assumed an almost total divorce between the aims of Jesus and the concrete political issues of his day. It is not surprising then that many people today would be perplexed by, or distinctly uncomfortable with, any talk of a political Jesus.

But is a non-political Jesus historically (or even theologically) credible? Is it really possible to isolate Jesus from the social and political problems of his time? Is it true to the gospel narratives to do so? If the kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed had nothing to do with the kingdoms of this world, why did the worldly rulers of his day conspire to kill him? How could Jesus claim to be the long-awaited royal messiah of Jewish expectation without coming to terms with the political and military implications of that role? Was Jesus the only Palestinian Jewish teacher of his day who was unaffected by the intense sufferings of his people languishing under Roman imperial domination and indifferent to their yearnings for national liberation? And why would the Romans condemn Jesus to death by crucifixion – a form of execution used primarily to intimidate provincial rebels and discourage resistance to imperial rule – if he were merely an innocuous, other-worldly spiritual guide who posed no real threat to Caesar's dominion? Can Jesus' death be satisfactorily explained without consideration of his perceived political significance?

Obviously not, as a growing body of Jesus-scholarship now recognises. Indeed in their attempt to give account of the historical Jesus, several scholars now appeal to the so-called "criterion of crucifiability". By this they mean that no putative reconstruction of the life and ministry of Jesus can claim to be historically plausible if it does not adequately explain why he ended up suffering the politically-expressive penalty of crucifixion. Given that crucifixion was reserved mainly for slaves and rebels among subject peoples, the fact that Jesus experienced such a fate must surely indicate that the Romans considered him to be an insurrectionist of at least some kind. The longstanding failure of Christian interpreters to reckon sufficiently with this brute fact betrays, one might suspect, not just a failure of historical imagination, but also an instinctive anti-Judaism (a failure to take seriously Jesus' role as a first-century Jewish prophet), as well as an incipient docetism (a failure to take seriously Christ's full humanity and the historical situatedness of the incarnation).

There is a second reason too why my thesis about the politics of Jesus is more radical than it might appear. To

propose, as I have, that the political values and priorities evident in the words and deeds of Jesus ought to exercise normative authority for subsequent Christian political activity is radical because it flies in the face of the way the mainstream Christian Church has itself exercised political power and influence down through much of its history, at least since the time of Constantine. As we will see, in his own teaching and activity Jesus presented a stark alternative to the ruthless and coercive political practices of the Roman Empire and its client Jewish and Herodian rulers, and paid the ultimate price for doing so. Happily Jesus' alternative political vision was vindicated by God through his resurrection from the dead, and subsequently by the rapid spread of communities of his followers throughout the world professing loyalty to the lordship of Christ rather than to the lordship of Caesar.¹

But in time the empire struck back.

Having failed to suppress the Christian movement by force, it chose to co-opt it. Christianity became the State religion. The maverick Jewish prophet who had inspired this new religious movement was increasingly forgotten, or was rather transposed into a heavenly imperial lord who, on the one hand, secured eternal salvation for the faithful by the merits of his death and resurrection, and, on the other hand, authorised the existing empire to carry on its politics much as before, though with some modifications. It wasn't long before the institutional church itself began to replicate

in its own life and behaviour the hierarchical structures and coercive instincts of the wider imperial order, craving prestige and honour for its bishops and clerics and promoting its own self-interest on earth by a pernicious combination of flattery and battery.²

In this new Christendom setting, to be a Christian no longer required, at least for the majority of believers, and certainly not for those in positions of authority, any conscientious commitment to the egalitarian and peacemaking politics of Jesus of Nazareth. It simply required the good fortune to have been born into the Christian empire, and the good sense to subscribe to orthodox Christian belief. In Christendom's orthodoxy the figure of Christ came to function more as the central link in the doctrine of salvation than as a meaningful paradigm for Christian values and praxis. Tellingly the church's historic creeds are all but silent on ethics in general, and on the strenuous ethical demands of Jesus in particular. Arguably it is this omission that allowed the church historically to bear the name of Christ yet do the work of the devil at the same time. In the interests of doctrinal orthodoxy, the church raised armies and waged war, tortured heretics and burned witches, persecuted dissenters and compelled conversions. It was only able to do so because it had first depoliticised the teaching and example of Jesus; it had silenced the prophetic voice which had once railed against oppression and hierarchical domination.

Thankfully the church no longer burns witches or deploys its own armies. But most confessing Christians, and a disappointing number of our pastors, bishops and



theological educators, not to mention our politicians, are still disturbingly deaf to the political dimensions of Jesus' preaching and practice, and to its far-reaching implications for shaping an authentically Christian political witness today. But why is this the case? Why do modern readers of the gospels still commonly, if not completely, miss the political ramifications of Jesus' proclamation? And why is it that today's Christian voice in the public square is so often bereft of any anchoring in the story of Jesus, whether explicit or implicit, thus allowing alternative sources of authority, such as conservative middle class values and morality, to fill the vacuum? Whence comes this depoliticised Jesus?

THE DEPOLICISATION OF JESUS:

There are, I think, five main factors that have permitted, and continue to perpetuate, the profound depoliticising of Jesus that prevails today, both within the church and without.

1. *Politics ancient and modern:*

The first, and most determinative, reason why modern Christians fail to notice the political character of Jesus' activity is that we work with a very narrow conception of what constitutes "political" activity. We come to the New Testament with the modern dichotomy between church and state in our minds, and think of politics in terms of the science and art of government, the concrete operation of centralised institutional mechanisms for running society. Because Jesus did not form a political party or run for office in the Sanhedrin, because he did not lay down a blueprint for society or theorize about the nature of social or economic institutions, modern readers quickly conclude that he was an apolitical spiritual teacher who kept himself aloof from the sordid realities of political life. He accepted that people owe to Caesar the duties of good citizenship, his *real* concern was that his hearers rendered unto God what was God's, namely their wholehearted love and spiritual devotion.

From this it follows that the conflict Jesus is constantly embroiled in in the gospels is to be viewed as a *religious* conflict with *religious* leaders over *religious* issues, not a conflict with political leaders over political issues. Jesus is seen primarily as a religious reformer who evoked predictable hostility from the religious establishment because of his new religious views. This goes hand in hand with the presumption that it is the ethnic identity and religious belief of Jesus' hearers that are most important for understanding Jesus' interaction with them, much more so than the enormous social, economic and political disparities that existed among them. Jesus' contemporaries are all lumped together as "Jews" who adhered to the religion of "Judaism". All other differences among them in terms of social location and historical experience are considered secondary or even irrelevant to appreciating the thrust of Jesus' message and the goal of his mission.

But all this is highly questionable. It is patently anachronistic to project onto ancient Jewish society (or any

other traditional society for that matter) the modern Western distinction between church and state. Religion, politics and economics formed an indivisible unity in Jewish Palestine, and indeed in antiquity in general. The religious leaders of Jesus' day also exercised political control, with access to the corridors of power being determined by personal wealth and hereditary claim and hence open to only a tiny elite. The law of Moses was the law of the land, and the Sanhedrin, chaired by the high priest, was the major arm of domestic government. The Temple was the centre of spiritual and civil authority, as well as the powerhouse of the Jerusalem economy and a cause of huge economic strain on the common people. It was also the primary institution for conferring legitimacy on the Rome's high priestly client rulers, who themselves were finally responsible to the Roman procurator.

From this it follows that Jesus' conflict with the scribal and priestly authorities, which looms so large in the gospel accounts, was simultaneously a conflict with the political managers of the nation, as well as with those who controlled most of the nation's wealth,

much of which had been expropriated from the peasantry. As Richard Horsley points out, the primary division in first-century Palestine was not one between finely nuanced schools of theological interpretation but between the rulers and the ruled, between the tiny minority of wealthy power brokers and their retainers, and the vast majority of ordinary people, who were typically indebted and always vulnerable to abuse.³ The gospels make it clear that it was to this latter group Jesus primarily directed his mission. It was a target audience which, because of its severely oppressed condition, was already highly politicised; it was perpetually prone to social unrest and a fertile recruiting ground for the many popular movements of protest and revolt that sprung up in Jewish Palestine during the Roman period. To imagine, then, that Jesus could address the liberating message of God's kingdom (itself a political category) to this exploited and downtrodden group *without thereby engaging in political activity*, and politics of the most subversive kind, is to fail to reckon with the semantic content of Jesus' language and the concrete socio-political realities of the period.

It is true, of course, that Jesus did not speculate about the structures of human society in the manner of a Greek philosopher or modern policy maker. He was a prophet not a philosopher. Nor did he lay out a master-plan for the operation of societal institutions. Had he done so, it would have long since become obsolete and irrelevant. But this does not mean that he was indifferent to political affairs. Politics is essentially about the exercise of power – social, economic, cultural, religious and coercive power – in the *polis*, in society, and about these matters, as we shall see, Jesus had much to say.

Moreover the political ramifications of what he taught and practiced did not escape his opponents. Jesus' message and lifestyle, his disregard for certain traditions and customs, his accentuation of the Torah's central

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imperatives of justice, mercy and faithfulness, his claim to divine authority over the evil powers that oppressed God's people, his high-handed action in the Temple precincts, his consorting with outcasts sinners, and much more, were perceived by his enemies as a challenge to the very cornerstones of Jewish society and ultimately to the Roman provincial peace.⁴ It is not surprising therefore that those most antagonistic to Jesus' articulation of the rule of God were those in positions of religious, political and military power in the ruling establishment of Israel, both Jewish and Roman. They had a vested interest in the way things were and had most to lose from Jesus' demand for the reordering of personal and social relationships in accordance with the eschatological will of God.⁵

(ii) The interpretive grid of post-Enlightenment

individualism: A second factor that perpetuates apolitical readings of the Jesus story is the distorting influence of Western individualism. Modern interpreters tend to view Jesus as a solitary figure who interacted with other detached individuals on a one-to-one basis. He did not engage with civic groups or political institutions or social networks but only with receptive (or sometimes hostile) individuals, summoning them to personal conversion and spiritual renewal.

Now it is demonstrably true that Jesus interacted with individual personalities, like Nicodemus and Jairus, Bartimaeus and the Roman centurion, the Gerasene demoniac and the woman at the well, and he showed a striking respect for individual conscience and choice. It is also true that he required of a select group of his followers a willingness to subordinate the responsibilities of family life to the more urgent demands of extending his message to others. Some individuals had to abandon homes and businesses, and to forego obligations to parents and local communities, in order to join Jesus on his itinerant preaching ministry.⁶ In this sense Jesus prioritised individual responsibility over the obligations of social convention. But it would be a huge mistake to conclude from this that Jesus was solely concerned with the spiritual welfare of autonomous individuals or that he encouraged the disintegration of communal life by detaching people permanently from their social environment.

It is crucial to recognise that in pre-modern Jewish society individual identity was inherently *relational* in character. People derived their sense of selfhood, personal esteem and well-being from their participation in wider social networks, especially those centred on the extended family and the local village community. Western individualism promotes the deception that human personhood and fulfilment are somehow inherent in individuals as free-wheeling, self-aware autonomous agents. The ancients knew better. No person is an island; humanity requires co-humanity; self-knowledge derives from fellowship with others.⁷ The reality is that people's lives are always embedded in social networks and shared cultural traditions. That being so, it would have been impossible for Jesus to address the circumstances of individuals without at the same time affecting the character

of the communities to which they belonged, which were in turn deeply affected by the wider patterns of colonial domination and exploitation.

It is worth observing that even when Jesus interacted with individual figures he usually did so in public space, under the notice of the "crowds". When Jesus visited towns and hamlets to teach and heal, he typically went to the synagogue where the whole village populace would gather. Synagogues in the first-century were not just religious institutions; they were also places where community education, discussion and decision-making took place. They were the local assemblies in which the more-or-less self-governing village communities of Galilee and Judea managed their own affairs. As such they were quasi-political entities, and in visiting them "Jesus was more like a politician on the campaign trail than a schoolmaster...more like a subversive playwright than an actor".⁸

(iii) Fragmentary reading

strategies: A third factor contributing to the prevalent depoliticisation of Jesus are the

atomistic reading strategies employed by gospel readers and interpreters. All attention gets focused on isolated sayings of Jesus, or individual miracle stories, or the meaning of particular parables, with little consideration being given to how these individual items fit into the larger story being told by the evangelists or how they reflect the economic and socio-political realities of the first-century world in which the story is set.

This fragmentary approach is commonplace in both popular and scholarly approaches to the gospels. At a popular level, most preaching and devotional reading of the gospels concentrates on small tracts of text separated off from the larger narrative setting. Similarly church lectionaries, although a very ancient and helpful tool for engaging the full witness of Scripture, still do make a virtue out of breaking the gospel accounts down into very small units and distributing them throughout the year. More concerning however is what many gospel critics do. In the name of sound historical method, critical scholars apply "scientific" tests of authenticity to the Jesus-tradition in order to siphon off material that can be considered to be historically reliable. The limited amount of data extracted by this method is usually predominantly sayings-material – things Jesus said more than things Jesus did – since it is much harder to validate the historicity of third-person narratives which are full of fantastic features and clearly serve as Christian propaganda. The resulting collection of "authentic" sayings and parables are then treated as repositories of meaning in their own right, independent of the literary or historical context in which they occur in the gospel tradition.

The problems with this approach are manifold, not the least being that it inevitably reduces Jesus to an dehistoricised "talking head", someone who hovers serenely above the mundane circumstances of ordinary life and communicates moral or spiritual insights in the form of decontextualised aphorisms, proverbs and parables, or by the occasional striking deed. But no real human being ever communicates that way. No one limits their speech to short

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sentences or brief sound bites unrelated to specific situations and disconnected from ongoing human relationships, or unhooked from the shared traditions, experiences and meanings of their audience. To try to understand the significance of Jesus' words and deeds without reference to the concrete social and political circumstances of actual Jewish communities under Roman rule is like trying to understand the sermons and speeches of Martin Luther King without reference to the bitter legacy of American slavery, the injustices of segregation, and the struggles of the civil rights movement.⁹

The only way, then, to do justice to the individual words and deeds of Jesus is always to view them within the context of the larger gospel narrative of his life and mission, rooted as it is, and as Jesus himself historically was, is in the real life world of colonial Palestine, where prophetic and messianic movements of liberation were constantly springing up.

(iv) Jesus the prophet: Several times I have referred to Jesus as a Jewish prophet. There can be little doubt that the gospel writers present Jesus in such terms,¹⁰

and in a good number of his own sayings Jesus refers to himself as a prophet.¹¹ His repeated warnings of impending judgment on the nation and its rulers are also evidence of Jesus' prophetic persona.¹² It is precisely in his guise as a prophet that Jesus exercises such a politically-charged role. Much the same could be said for his messianic identity. It is extremely likely that Jesus saw himself as Israel's awaited messiah, even if he was decidedly chary about employing the title itself, and he was indisputably executed by Pilate as a messianic pretender.¹³ To claim messiahship was to assert a *political* function, since the most common expectation of the coming messiah is that he would be a princely warrior who would defeat God's enemies, restore the throne of David, and lead Israel to universal sovereignty over the nations.

Yet there has been a curious reluctance among Christian interpreters to take seriously Jesus' prophetic and messianic significance. This reluctance again has both popular and scholarly expressions. At a popular theological level, it is Jesus' divinity that usually squeezes out his prophetic credentials. Jesus was not *just* a prophet, Christian apologists (rightly) insist, he was the incarnate Son of God, a divine being, not just a human being. Jews and Muslims may honour Jesus as a prophet, but, they (rightly) urge, we Christians know him as God's only begotten son.

At a scholarly level, it is Jesus' messianic self-consciousness that is more disputed. Many gospel critics are unconvinced that Jesus saw himself as a messiah, and while they may allow him the label of prophet in lieu, even that identity is stripped of much political content. There is even one strand of American scholarship that has now demoted Jesus further from the status of prophet to that of peasant sage or wisdom teacher or Cynic-like philosopher. These scholars, reacting negatively to the apocalyptic fantasies of American fundamentalism, strip Jesus'

preaching of all traces of apocalyptic judgment, leaving behind a harmless wandering bard who travelled around the countryside "teaching an alternative hippie-like lifestyle to a bunch of rootless nobodies".¹⁴ Why anyone, least of all Pilate, would want to crucify such a person is difficult to fathom.

But the evidence that Jesus considered himself to be a prophet, and was regarded by his contemporaries as such, is overwhelming. It is true that his closest followers soon came to regard him as much more than a prophet,¹⁵ but they never saw him as less, and it was in the basic mould of a prophet that Jesus made his most decisive political impact. "Prophet" was a fluid category in Jesus' day, embracing a wide diversity of functions and emphases.¹⁶ Some prophets were clerical and establishment figures, others were more scholarly types; some were lone wolves delivering oracles of judgment or deliverance, others were popular leaders of mass movements who modelled themselves on the great prophetic figures of the past, like Moses, Joshua and Elijah, and who proclaimed God's imminent intervention to bring deliverance from Roman servitude and idolatry.

Jesus fits best into this latter

category of a popular prophet leading a proletarian movement of liberation and renewal, centred on a distinctive understanding of God's kingdom and its implications. Distinctive it certainly was, especially in its foreswearing of hatred and violence toward the enemy, but it was not apolitical, for, as Wright observes, "anyone who was announcing God's kingdom...was engaging in political activity. The question is, rather, what sort of politics were they undertaking, and with what end in view".¹⁷

(v) A kingdom not of this world: The four factors I have discussed so far that have served to depoliticise Jesus – the spurious separation of religion and politics, the distorting grid of Western individualism, the fragmenting of the gospel story into isolated bits and pieces, and the discomfort with Jesus' prophetic or messianic office – all come to roost in the actual exposition of the text. Those who not only miss but positively resist the idea of a politically engaged Jesus cite two texts in particular as proof that Jesus wasn't much concerned with political affairs. The first is Jesus' response to Pilate's question about whether he considered himself to be the king of the Jews

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'...Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' (John 18:35-38)

This text more than any other has been used by conservative interpreters to encourage Christian quietism

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and disengagement from political or social justice issues, since the kingdom which Jesus proclaims “is not of this world...it is not from here”. It is a *heavenly*, not an earthly, kingdom. The second text comes from the so-called Tribute Question passage, where Jesus is asked directly about whether it is acceptable to support Caesar’s regime through paying taxes.

Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.” And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “Caesar’s.” Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him (Mark 12:13-17).

Upon this text a thorough-going, and thoroughly baleful, “two kingdoms” theology has been constructed, according to which the State is deemed to have rightful charge of social and political affairs, while the church has control of spiritual and religious matters.¹⁸ Christians must therefore be good, obedient citizens in society in recognition of Caesar’s legitimate authority, but they should concentrate most of their energies in developing their relationship to God and serving the church, and leave worldly affairs to those whom God has appointed to rule. It would be no exaggeration to say that without this reading of Jesus’ famous words “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”, reinforced by Paul’s call to Christian submission to ruling authorities in Romans 13:1-6, the Nazi holocaust might never have happened.

There is no time to exegete either of these two passages in detail here.¹⁹ Suffice it to say that the familiar readings of both texts are dangerously misguided. Even in the context of John’s Gospel – the most “spiritual” of all the gospels – Jesus’ saying “my kingdom is not of this world” cannot be taken as an affirmation that God’s kingdom is a purely spiritual reality unrelated to worldly realities. After all it was out of love for this world that God sent Christ into the world in the first place, in order that “through him the world might be saved” (John 3:16-17). The term “kingdom” here, as always in biblical tradition, has the active force of “rule” or “kingship” or “power” more than place or territory or realm, so that what Jesus is really saying is that his style of exercising kingly authority is unlike that of other kings. His kingship conforms, not to brutal coercive rule of Herod or Caesar or Caiaphas, but to the compassionate, healing rule of God. It does not rest on violent coercion but on loving persuasion.

That is why in the second part of the verse, which is hardly ever quoted by conservative apologists, Jesus explains that “if my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews”. The thing that most differentiates Jesus’ kingship from worldly forms of kingship is its *non-violence*. His authority is “not from here” – it is not molded by *realpolitik* considerations. If it were, his followers would have launched a violent campaign to seize Jerusalem and install him on throne. Instead God’s kingdom exerts its power by peaceful means. It is still a political reality (it is still about power), but it embodies the politics of peace, not the politics of conquest.

Jesus’ reply to the question about tribute points in the same direction. Jesus’ enemies seek to trap him with a Catch-22 question: “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” Both Jesus’ questioners and Jesus himself knew full well that, according to God’s law, it was *unlawful* to offer homage to a pagan ruler who blasphemously claimed universal sovereignty for himself. In recent memory Jewish radicals had gone

In a brilliant riposte, Jesus evades the trap by snaring his opponents in their own petard.

to horrifying deaths for their refusal to pay tribute to Caesar in the name of the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me”. But both parties also knew full well that, according to Roman law, it was *obligatory* to pay taxes and tribute to the imperium. So Jesus was trapped. If he endorsed taxation, he was in open breach of the Torah, at least in the eyes of the faithful. If he opposed taxation, he was in defiance of Rome and could well have to pay for it with his life.

In a brilliant riposte, Jesus evades the trap by snaring his opponents in their own petard. First he asks his interrogators to show him a denarius, the Roman coin used for tribute payment. The very fact that they can so quickly produce a coin exposes the insincerity of their inquiry. For their very possession of foreign currency confirmed that his questioners had themselves already opted for subservience to Rome, even while provoking Jesus to declare his Torah-based opposition to it. Jesus then asks them to verbalise whose image (*eikon*) and whose title the coin bore. In doing this he was both deliberately underscoring the blasphemous nature of the inscription on the coin, which ascribed deity to the emperor (“Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus”), and reminding his hearers of who God’s true image bearers in the world really are, namely God’s own people (cf. Gen 1:27). Only then does Jesus make his climactic declaration about rendering to Caesar what is his due and to God what is his.

Given that Jesus had first intentionally highlighted the idolatrous nature of Caesar’s coinage, it is unthinkable that his final pronouncement was intended to be a straight forward endorsement of his listeners’ obligation to pay their taxes, though this is how it is often interpreted.²⁰ If his words amounted to an unambiguous affirmation of Rome’s right to levy tribute, it is hard to see how his enemies could construe them as sedition and report him to Pilate for “perverting our nation and forbidding us to pay taxes to Caesar” (Luke 23:2). If anything, Jesus’ statement is more naturally taken as a bold declaration of independence from

Rome's tribute-generating machine. But Jesus stops short of explicitly forbidding payment of tribute. Instead he draws attention to the fundamental principle at issue: One must first be clear on what rightfully belongs to Caesar and what rightfully belongs to God, then decide on the specifics of tribute. Of course every Jew knew the "earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1), and that their political allegiance was owed exclusively to Yahweh alone. That meant that *nothing* belonged of right to Caesar, least of all the God-given land of Israel and its produce (cf. Lev 25:23).

It does not follow from this, however, that Jesus was encouraging outright tax refusal by his Jewish compatriots, which would have been catastrophic. Instead he was inviting them to *reframe the meaning of the payment* they must make by turning it from a symbol of subservience into a symbol of resistance. Since Israel's God is lord of all, Caesar could legitimately claim ownership to nothing – *except one thing*, the despicable coins minted in his own honour. So in returning these idolatrous coins to their pagan owner, albeit in the form of coercive taxes, Jesus' hearers could understand themselves to be symbolically ridding God's land of the symbols of imperial domination and reasserting their own vocation as God's true image bearers on earth.²¹

To sum up thus far: Once we cast off the modern blinkers we bring to the gospel story, it becomes clear that Jesus' message of the dawning kingdom of God had significant political implications. His announcement that God's long awaited reign was now asserting itself in the world, and his consequent summons for people to rally to the flag, had, as Wright observes "far more in common with the founding of a revolutionary party than with what we now think of as either 'evangelism' or 'ethical teaching'".²² It is a drastic impoverishment of Jesus' message and a blunting of its radical edge to suggest that Jesus was only concerned with the spiritual needs and personal conduct of individuals. The most fatal objection to this familiar portrait of Jesus is that it fails utterly to meet the criterion of crucifiability. As William Herzog observes:

If [Jesus] had been the kind of teacher popularly portrayed in the North American church, a master of the inner life, teaching the importance of spirituality and a private relationship with God, he would have been supported by the Romans as part of their rural pacification program. That was exactly the kind of religion the Romans wanted peasants to have. Any belief that he encouraged... withdrawal from the world of politics and economics into a spiritual or inner realm would have met with official approval.²³

But that is not what happened. Instead Jesus and his movement were perceived by the imperial and colonial authorities to be a political time bomb that urgently needed defusing, and for very good reason. To understand why, it is important to recognize the methodology Jesus used to make political comment and work for social change, since the political options open to Jesus were quite unlike those open to us in liberal democratic societies.

¹ Cf. Acts 10:36; Rom 10:9, 12; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11; Rev 17:14

² Cf. Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999),

esp. 33-42.

³ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: the Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 59-60; also William R. Herzog, *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 90-108.

⁴ Cf. Luke 19:39; John 11:50.

⁵ See C. D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 179-82.

⁶ On this see the seminal book by Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and his Followers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981).

⁷ On the implications of this for human rights theory, see my *Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights ion the Biblical Tradition* (Telford Pa.: Pandora Press, 2001).

⁸ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 172.

⁹ I borrow this helpful analogy from Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 13.

¹⁰ Matt 13:57/Mark 6:4, cf. Luke 4:24; Matt 8:28; Matt 16:14/Luke 9:19; Matt 21:11, 26; Mark 6:14-16/ Matt 14:1-2/Luke 9:7-9; Luke 7:16, 39-50; 13:33; John 1:21; 4:19; 6:14; 7:40, 52; Mark 14:65/Matt 26:68; Luke 22:64; 24:19; Acts 3:22; 7:37.

¹¹ Mark 6:4/Matt 13:57; Luke 4:24/GTh 31; John 4:44; Luke 13:31-33. Jesus also regarded John the Baptist as a prophet: Luke 7:26/Matt 11:9; cf. John 1:22; Mark 11:27-33

¹² For perhaps the most thorough recent analysis of judgment in Jesus' preaching, see Marius Resier, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). See also Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and its Interpreters* (New York & London: T & T Clark, 2005), 56-110. Mark 15:1-38; Matt 27:11-32; Luke 23;1-46; John 18:28-19:38. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 7.

¹³ See Mark 8:27-30, cf. 6:14-16. To be sure, Jesus deems John the Baptist to be "more than a prophet" (Luke 7:26/Matt 11:9). But significantly, Jesus is only once referred to as a prophet outside gospels (Acts 3:22). His significance transcended established prophetic categories.

¹⁴ On different types of prophet in the first century, see Wright, *Jesus and Victory*, 153-55; Herzog, *Jesus Justice*, 51-60. See also Morna D. Hooker, *The Signs of a Prophet: The Prophetic Actions of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1997) and David R. Kaylor, *Jesus the Prophet: His Vision of the Kingdom on Earth* (Louisville Ky: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

¹⁵ Wright, *Jesus and Victory*, 203.

¹⁶ See my fuller discussion in *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 16-30.

¹⁷ On the tribute passage, see Wright, *Jesus and Victory*, 502-07; Herzog, *Jesus Justice*, 219-32; Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 307-17.

¹⁸ Contra Oscar Cullman, *The State in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1957), 34-38; W.D. Davies, "Ethics in the New Testament", *Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible* II:171.

¹⁹ So Herzog, *Jesus Justice*, 231-32.

²⁰ Wright, *Jesus and Victory*, 301. This interpretation fits well with the way Walter Wink, and others, understand the strategy underlying Jesus' injunctions in Matthew 5:21-48. For a brief account, see Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), esp. 98-111.

²¹ Quoted by Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, Penn: Trinity, 2001), 236-36.

Conviction

MAC NICOLL

They were both early for that Presbytery committee meeting and there was nothing for it but to engage in some conversation. Alan had just completed a hard day at school and last night's Federal budget speech had him feeling ready for a fight. "Bloody conservative government, rattling on about families and justice and ignoring the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots," he had been mumbling to himself as he trudged up the old and well-worn stairs of the Presbytery office building. "Why can't people see what's happening to our society, why can't we take seriously Jesus' teaching about loving one another and caring for those on the edge?"

Nigel, who was standing by the window gazing out over the afternoon fog, turned to greet him. Alan had met Nigel briefly only last month and had already summed him up. In Nigel, Alan saw a contented, wealthy, private school – educated snob. His cultured accent, elegant clothes and smooth style were an affront to all that Alan had decided was important in the world. "That's what's wrong with this church," he thought, "full of self-satisfied wealthy passengers who haven't a clue about the real world."

"Hello, Alan," began Nigel in a friendly tone, "have you had a good day?"

Alan, interpreting the question as patronising and feeling ready for a fight, plunged in. "Not really," he replied. "Six periods teaching, duty at lunch time and three kids in detention after school for swearing at a young teacher. A typical Friday, I guess, and I don't see our government caring two hoots about the problems in high schools. And the trouble is our church is so busy supporting its precious schools that it couldn't care less about the state system." And then, going on with a full head of steam, he added, "But I guess you sent your kids to the Grammar School. So you wouldn't know much about this sort of thing."

"Well, I am a bit out of touch," Nigel responded, "because we had to send our three off to boarding school. The farm was too far from the nearest high school for them to commute. And that's a while ago now. Makes me feel pretty old when I think about it, having three kids in their twenties."

"What are they doing now?" asked Alan, expecting to hear that they were successful stockbrokers or lawyers or whatever. If he had been honest with himself, he was rather hoping this would be the case, not out of a generous spirit but because it would just confirm his convictions about the unfairness of the system and it would give him a chance to tell of his own son's failure to find work since leaving the local high school.

"Well," Nigel responded, "Paul is up in the Territory jackerooing for a couple of years, Robert is starting an apprenticeship and Jane is living in assisted accommodation in town trying to cope with her bipolar illness. It hit her in second year at Uni and it's been a rotten time for us all. We've spent lots of time blaming ourselves, wondering what we did wrong. Life's not simple, is it?"

There was no time to go on because at this point they were interrupted by the arrival of other committee members and it was time to get started on the meeting. It was a

special meeting, called to help the Social Question Committee confront the morality of the war in Iraq, and there was a hush of expectation as they all pulled in their chairs and waited for the Chair to open the meeting.

Alan glanced around the table. "I guess I'll be fighting a losing battle," he mused. "Farmers, ex-servicemen, a couple of local business men, some well-meaning middle-aged women and those three fundamentalist clergy from the city. They're bound to be supporters of this rotten war. How come they're so blinkered and out of touch?"

"Before we start our discussion," said the Chair, "I have a verse to read to you from Saint Luke's gospel. It's an introduction to the parable of the tax gatherer and the Pharisee. Let us listen for a word from God for us at this time: Luke, Chapter 18 and verse 9.

Alan liked the Chair, and approved of her approach to ethics and justice, so he settled back in his seat thinking, "I bet she's chosen a reading to stir these others up."

Picking up her New Testament, and turning slowly to the gospel of Luke, the Chair read:

"And he spoke this parable unto those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and who despised others."

Walking the way to discipleship

CHERYL WOELK

"He has told you, O people, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" – Micah 6:8

HWACHEON, South Korea (Mennonite Mission Network/ Mennonite Church Canada Witness) — What happens when an unlikely group of Christians living in different countries, speaking various languages and coming from diverse backgrounds, meet together for nine days of discipleship training from an Anabaptist perspective? They do justice, love kindness and walk humbly.

From July 7-15, fifteen participants from Taiwan, Japan, Philippines and South Korea gathered together to dialogue and experience what it means to be Anabaptist in Asia. The Asia Anabaptist Discipleship Training Program, hosted by Jesus Village Church and the Korea Anabaptist Center, took place at Abba Shalom Koinonia in the mountains near the demilitarized zone three hours northeast of Seoul. Despite the peaceful setting, the military bases and soldiers in the area were a constant reminder of the context in which we are called to be disciples.

The training program theme was "Walking the Way," based on Micah 6:8. Richard Rancap, pastor in the Integrated Mennonite Church of the Philippines, challenged the group to consider carefully what it means to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly in individual contexts. After several days at Abba, the trainees divided into three groups. A "doing justice" group learned about peace- and justice-related issues in Korea by visiting an organization working for land justice, a home for elderly women who were sexual slaves of the Japanese military and "The Frontiers," a Christian organization sending young people to serve through peace camps in conflict areas around the world.

A “loving kindness” group visited with patients at a hospice, walked with workers from a Christian homeless ministry, learned from the Korean Sharing Movement working in North Korea and served 1,000 lunches at a soup kitchen in central Seoul. The “walking humbly” group examined Korean churches’ discipleship and community and history. Group members visited the largest church in the world (Yeoido Full Gospel Church) and worshipped and served with Sarangbang Community Church, a small, rural, community-focused congregation that runs an alternative school.

During final-day reflections, a Japanese participant working with peace and justice projects at her church and issues of sexual slavery said she was inspired to continue her work, knowing others in Asia support her. A Filipino participant will explore ongoing food distribution and medical service in her country. Words from a homeless man spoken in Japanese convinced one participant to work at homeless ministries needed in Japan. “Without action,” the Japanese man said, “we can’t know the meaning of prayer and study.”

One participant from Taiwan leaves with a passion for peace-building awareness in the Taiwanese Mennonite Church, particularly in relationship with China. A Korean brother renewed his commitment to a discipleship involving faith and action that combines justice, kindness and humility. Finally, another Korean participant said she has found an identity as a peacemaker. Previously unsure of what it meant for her to be Mennonite, she will change her approach when she returns to her classes at a Mennonite school in the United States.

What happened when this unlikely group gathered? They experienced God’s spirit in community and left inspired and encouraged to continue following God’s call to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly in all contexts. Participants hope to continue learning from each other “walking the way” as disciples of Christ in Asia.

Author Cheryl Woelk works at Korea Anabaptist Center through Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

A peacemaker’s personal battle

GOSHEN, Indiana — When Goshen College Associate Professor of Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies Carolyn Schrock-Shenk was growing up in a Conservative Mennonite home near Middlebury, Indiana, she was, at one point, the fastest runner in her elementary school and was an all-around athlete. But her life was forever changed when, as a senior in college in 1980, she was in a car accident and was seriously injured with broken vertebra. “I was told I miraculously escaped paralysis,” she said. “I said then that it was because God knew I couldn’t handle life in a wheelchair.”

From 1980 to 2003, Schrock-Shenk was able to walk and move fairly freely. She and her husband Dave Schrock-Shenk served with Mennonite Central Committee in the Philippines and in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and she directed Mennonite Conciliation Service before accepting the teaching position at Goshen College in 2000.

But Schrock-Shenk slowly lost function in her legs and pain became a constant challenge, which brought her to

the place of needing to make a decision about whether to have spinal cord surgery to stop the deterioration or not. “I was told by my surgeons that I would regret the surgery whenever I did it,” she said. “If it was successful, I would regret not having done it earlier and preserved more function. If it wasn’t successful, I would regret having done it at all.”

After months of deliberation and help in discernment from friends and family, Schrock-Shenk travelled to a spinal cord specialty centre in Miami, Florida, for extensive and invasive surgery. But, unfortunately, the procedure in the fall of 2003 was only the beginning of a long and intense medical journey. Over the next two years, she experienced constant setbacks, undergoing 11 surgeries and experiencing rapid loss of function that has left her with no function below chest level.

Those years were excruciatingly difficult as her struggle for physical survival was mixed with dashed hopes, despair, questions about suffering and healing, and much deep grief. “While I have come a long way,” said Schrock-Shenk, “I will never be completely done grieving. There are times when I am suddenly filled with an intense longing for the body and life I once had.”

During those all-consuming two years, Schrock-Shenk was unable to teach her conflict studies courses or practice conflict transformation work. But in 2005 she returned to the classroom — to the pleasure of her students — in her wheelchair. “During the discernment period I was emphatic that I would never teach in a wheelchair,” said Schrock-Shenk, “now here I am. Peacemaking has become a very personal thing — trying to make peace with what life has handed me.”

Part of making peace internally has involved coming to terms with a new identity. “Even through the years of gradual loss, I understood myself to be fast-paced, full of energy, self-sufficient, able to multi-task, a risk-taker,” Schrock-Shenk said. “But those characteristics no longer fit.” Before needing a wheelchair, she described herself as “fiercely independent.”

“Now I am having to learn the hard lesson of being helped day after day,” Schrock-Shenk said, “And I’m very grateful for a supportive family, church and campus community that is making the learning easier.” But she has also sought to gain back some independence. She bikes again using a hand-pedalled bicycle; she learned how to drive a vehicle with hand controls; she navigates around campus in an electric wheelchair that even offers the ability to stand for periods of time.

The recent purchase of a van outfitted with hand controls, though, has given Schrock-Shenk a new lease on her changed life. When she drives her new van around town — to run errands, to haul her two sons Caleb and John to soccer practice or piano lessons, or to go to church at Assembly Mennonite on Sunday mornings — she is experiencing a sense of freedom that she hasn’t had for the last several years. Made possible by contributions from many generous family members and friends, one gift that she received towards the van stands out in her mind. Near the end of the fall semester, a student of Schrock-Shenk’s walked into her office with a manila envelope. When she opened it, inside was \$200 and a homemade card — signed by 13 of her students — that said, “We love you, Carolyn.

We heard you were raising money for a van and we wanted to help.”

Though her identity now also includes being a person in a wheelchair, this peacemaker, teacher, mother, spouse and friend continues to learn how to persevere in the midst of her greatest personal battle — which is probably one of the best lessons she can offer her students. “I do not understand God’s role in suffering and healing, and I am coming to terms with the ongoing mystery in that. What I

am clear about, however, is that God specializes in helping us to mine the gold from these difficult situations and that much good can be part of my future,” she said. “I am trying to trust that this life, so very different from what I wanted, can be rich and meaningful and complete. And that it can be a blessing to others.”

For a more detailed telling of Carolyn Schrock-Shenk’s story, see *Dreamseeker Magazine*, Spring 2006, Vol. 6, No. 2. <http://www.cascadiapublishinghouse.com/dsm/spring06/current.htm>.

BOOKS

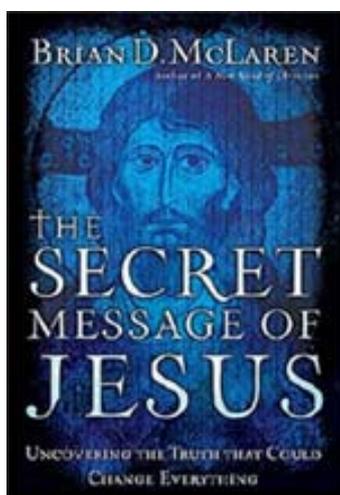
What’s emerging out of the “emerging church”? *The Secret Message of Jesus*

W PUBLISHING GROUP, 2006

REVIEW AND RANT BY JARROD MCKENNA

Ever wonder what will emerge out of the ‘emerging church movement’?

Watching from the very different missional context of Australia it’s interesting to observe some of the heat Brian McLaren’s new book *The Secret Message of Jesus* is receiving on the very different (and sometimes bizarre and disturbing) landscape of American Christianity. While the title sounds like it’s a flaky Gnostic text you’d find in a New Age book store



alongside crystals and tacky objects exploiting aspects of indigenous cultures, it is in fact one of the best pop communications of some of the most exciting orthodox biblical scholarship around. Like many of us, Brian with the title of the book has sought a ‘Mars hill moment’ with all the interest around *The Da Vinci Code*. Brian also asks us to look at the plank in our own eye and consider if the interest in Dan Brown’s book is “an experience in shared frustration with the status-quo, male dominated, power-orientated, cover-up-prone organised Christian religion” and a public expression of a longing for a vision of “Jesus that does him justice”.

Let me indulge in a personal story (mid-book review) for just a moment. I work as a nonviolence educator in prisons, schools and the community as well as being a trainer for activists. Earlier this year I was one of two keynote speakers (the other keynote was a Nobel Peace Prize nominee so needless to say I was the ‘littler note’ but excited by the opportunity none the less) at an event put on by Greenpeace and the Wilderness Society. After our address and workshop, a well-respected activist approached me to ask:

“Jarrod you said, ‘If you’re wanting a Jesus radical enough to transform the world, you wont find it in the pages of Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code*. Gandhi suggests to us that we will, like him, find this Jesus in the pages of Matthew’s

gospel.’ So why was this Jesus not found in my experience of church?”

If your reaction to this earnest question is along the lines of —“cause Gandhi’s wrong”, or “you can’t expect the church to be like Jesus” or “Jesus isn’t about transforming the world anyway”— then Brian McLaren’s book will be an interesting look at a differing perspective. The book is grounded in the Scriptures, sound scholarship and grassroots missionary experience. If you are often in the situation of being asked (or asking) such questions you will find a fellow traveller seeking to follow Christ with a deeper integrity in *The Secret Message of Jesus*, which addresses our changing culture, the on-going war(s) and ecological disaster we are living through.

In my thoroughly biased opinion, Brian is a popularist par excellence. By that I don’t mean that McLaren tickles the ears of his listeners with things they want to hear. In fact Brian (like all who start to live Christianity not divorced from Christ’s invitation to let our love for God be manifest in our actions towards our neighbour and even enemy) is unpopular in many circles. All you have to do is enter his name in a search engine to find that this is a man who is starting to experience the ‘blessings of being insulted, persecuted and having all kinds of false things said about him’ because of his commitment to a gospel that can transform the world.

By popularist I mean McLaren seems to have a gift for bringing the prophetic insights of biblical scholars whose exciting work too often sits on the academic margins of the church into the consciousness of the mainstream. (It’s here where I reveal my bias.) In *The Secret Message of Jesus* Brian is drawing on theologians and scholars that have shaped my ministry and the Peace Tree church community I’m a part of. John H. Yoder, Walter Wink, Tom Wright, Walter Brueggemann, Stanley Hauerwas and one of my mentors and professors Lee Camp, amongst others are all present in this all-star line up. Brian has a gift for digesting and making accessible these thinkers in a way that makes this book so easy to put in the hands of a diverse spectrum of people.

More than just a primer for some ground breaking scholarship *The Secret Message of Jesus* is a primer for the very message of Jesus, and discipleship. It provides an understanding of the ‘kingdom of God’ so authentic to Jesus and the historical context he was incarnate to, that reading it you can feel “with God all things are possible” including a transformed world. This world transformed Brian wonderfully calls “God’s dream for creation”.

It's interesting to note after Brian McLaren was arrested for protesting on behalf of the poor that some in the 'emerging church' are questioning if are they part of the same movement. One of the houses in the church community I'm a part of is named after a man I often quote and run workshops on, Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. MLK's faithfulness to the way of Christ meant that he was arrested more than 30 times while many 'moderate' church leaders labelled him "unchristian" for his Christ-like actions that challenged the injustices of segregation, racism, war and poverty. Like MLK, what most impresses me about McLaren is that he dares to believe the Gospel addresses the most pressing issues our world is facing. Not only does he believe this but he is willing to trust God enough to take risks, costly risks, which will make him unpopular with those who have a vested interest in the unredeemed Powers, both inside and outside the church.

A conversation I was having with a friend, many consider a leader in the emerging church movement in Australia, has me wondering if maybe we should all question whether we are part of the same movement as Brian McLaren. Dave Andrews made the interesting comment that some of the things emerging out of the "emerging church" are not new but rather the re-birthing of a faithful impulse seen throughout the centuries. **The Secret Message of Jesus** places itself in the counter flow of God's kingdom, (or as McLaren so helpfully paraphrases "God's revolution") amidst the mainstream safeness of Christianities that look like, bless and baptise the unredeemed kingdoms of this world.

Brian McLaren's new book suggests that the secret message of Jesus is the message of the 'kingdom of God'. If this is anything to go on, what could be emerging out of the emerging church movement is an "emerging kingdom movement". This might be less sexy than post-modern repackaging of doing church differently now with candles and digital projectors or providing privatised spiritualities to accompany the destruction of creation. But unlike these options what **The Secret Message of Jesus** points to is good news. Dr. M.L. King often preached that what we need is to "recapture the spirit of the early church". Brian McLaren in his newest book has joined this faithful impulse and recaptures this spirit of the Desert Amma and Abbas, the Benedictine's, the Waldensians, the Franciscans, the Anabaptists, the early Quakers, the early Pentecostals and the Catholic Worker Movement to name just a few.

This book is for all who want to follow Jesus in the invitation to join him in what one of my biggest influences, John H. Yoder called "The Original Revolution", the good news of God's kingdom at hand.

Jarrod McKenna's passion for sharing Christ's nonviolence in schools, prisons, churches, the community and activist circles has had him dubbed the "peace evangelist" and awarded the Donald



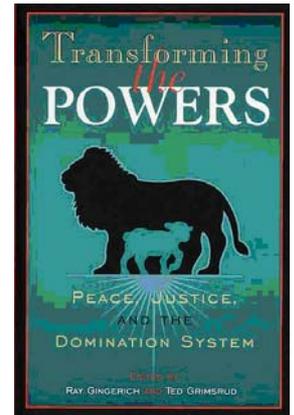
Groom Peace Fellowship for his work with young people for ecological and social justice. He is the founder and creative director of "EPYC" [Empowering Peacemakers in Your Community]. He's also founding member of The Peace Tree Christian Commune in one of his city's lowest socio-economic areas. There his sisters and brothers remind him that while he might rant about 'creation spirituality' he's yet to grow anything in the garden.



Transforming the Powers Peace, Justice, and the Domination System

EDITED BY **RAY GINGERICH AND TED GRIMSRUD**
FORTRESS PRESS, 2006

Walter Wink is the author of the landmark trilogy on "the Powers" – the spiritual dynamics at work in the institutions and social systems that shape our lives. In the three books – **Naming the Powers**, **Unmasking the Powers**, and **Engaging the Powers** – Wink explores a Christian response to structural evil. In a nutshell he says "The Powers are good; the Powers are fallen; the powers must be redeemed."



The book **Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice, and the Domination System** is a collection of papers presented at a conference on Wink's thought held at Eastern Mennonite University in March 2001. The conference presentations are supplemented with an additional chapter by Wink (worth the price of the book by itself.)

The presenters come from the fields of theology and ethics and cover the relation of the Powers to economics, politics and government, warmaking and peacemaking, personal ethics, and ecological and social justice. Contributors include Ray Gingerich, Ted Grimsrud, Daniel Liechty, Nancey Murphy, Glen Stassen, Willard Swartley, and Walter Wink.

Ted Grimsrud writes a helpful Introduction called "Engaging Walter Wink" where he summarizes Wink's work over the years. It is a good summary of the Powers trilogy but should not replace the actual reading of the books – the "Reader's Digest" version is never as good as the real thing. The book is then divided into three parts – Worldviews and the Powers, Understanding the Powers, and Engaging the Powers.

Wink opens part one with a chapter on "The New Worldview." "Worldviews are the fundamental presuppositions about reality, the elementary bases of thought for an entire epoch." (17) He explores several worldviews and then expounds on what he calls the "Integral Worldview."

Murphy, Liechty, and Grimsrud each have a chapter in Part One exploring the Powers from their particular field of study – philosophy, social work, and theology and peace studies. Liechty cites an example of the Powers at work from Lt. Col. Dave Grossman's book **On Killing**. Grossman worked for years as a military psychologist trying to get soldiers to overcome their natural inhibitions in regard to killing other human beings. Then he realized that:

"In the American media system of 'violence as entertainment,' in movies, television, and video games in particular, the culture is exposing and subjecting its children, from early age upward, to essentially the same kinds of conditioning techniques being used in the military to break down new recruits' inhibitions to point a gun at another

human being and pull the trigger. Combine that fact with the availability of weapons, and we have a clear recipe for disaster among our teens and young people.” (49)

What makes this a relevant example of the Powers at work in American society is that no one person or group “made conscious decisions about creating violent chaos in the country.”

“Each piece of the complex puzzle is created and set in place by good and respectable citizens, each simply trying to earn an honest and legal living by selling a legal product within the rules of the social system and protecting and defending the civil rights of people to enjoy those products. Yet the collective result of each of these pieces is a society in which children are being brought up with significantly decreased resistance to killing each other and significantly increased access to high-powered weapons for doing so. This is an example of the force of Principalities and Powers at work.” (49)

Wink also opens Part Two of the book with an excellent chapter entitled “Providence and the Powers.” He says “when we treat providence in isolation from the Powers, we turn providence into privileged treatment granted by God to the righteous, the chosen, and the few.” (68) He warns that “whenever Christian theology ignores the Powers, the notion of divine providence reverts to paganism (71)...it simply serves to legitimate the Domination System.” (72)

He also warns that “It was one of the great errors of the Enlightenment to believe that the spiritual realm is wholly good.” (73) He cites examples of how Hitler relied on “his inner voice.” “All things seemed to work together for good for Hitler during his ascent.” (74) Hitler credited “Providence” for his success and protection. Wink says there seems to be an “evil providence” at work “but ultimately, God’s providence prevails over the providence of the Powers, and, in Martin Luther King Jr.’s words, the universe does bend toward justice.” (75)

Wink explores “Synchronicity, Providence, and Prayer” and says “the very idea of an omnipotent God is deeply contaminated by dreams of domination: an ultimate and irresistible power able to impose our view of what is ‘right’ on the entire universe.” He concludes that “God cannot fix everything, because the people and the Powers that unfixed them in the first place have a stake in keeping them unfixed to their advantage.” (82)

Willard Swartley deals with biblical material concerning the Powers in a chapter entitled “Jesus Christ, Victor Over Evil.” He examines key New Testament passages and then looks at the early church that “did not so much confront the Powers as manifest the reality of a contrast community.” (106) He contends “that the early Christians’ response confounded the Powers because it witnessed to a unique strength and power among Christians, apart from the protection of the empire.” (109)

Chapter 8 is an exploration of Wink’s views in connection with the economic and political scene of sixteenth century Europe. Ray Gingerich uses the Peasants War as a case study and concludes his chapter with a call for a “paradigm shift” that unmask an entire ethos. “We remain bound by the Powers gone amok – the Powers of violence and deceit (war and economic greed) in the garb of democracy and freedom, which function as two strains of an

invisible death trap – culture-religion.” (126)

Glen Stassen opens Part Three with a chapter where he discusses his “Just Peacemaking Theory.” It is a good summary of what he covers in his book **Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace** (Westminster John Knox, 1992) but he does a good job of also interacting with other conference speakers and authors including Wink, Swartley, N.T. Wright, Clarence Jordan, and John Howard Yoder.

Swartley has another chapter where he explores “Resistance and Nonresistance.” He discusses the effects of “Individualism” and quotes Stanley Hauerwas who says:

“I maintain that the Sermon on the Mount presupposes the existence of a community constituted by the practice of nonviolence, and it is unintelligible divorced from such a community...the object of the Sermon on the Mount is to create dependence; it is to force us to need one another.” (151)

The book closes with another chapter by Stassen on “The Kind of Justice Jesus Cares About.” His interlocutors in this chapter include Swartley, Wright, Wink, and Richard Horsley. He concludes that Jesus was a prophet concerned about justice and this emerges clearly in Jesus’ proclamation of the reign of God. For us, he says, “The important question on which we should be focusing our research is, what are the marks and the practices of the kingdom so we can act in ways that prepare for it and participate in it, and so we can notice it when it comes?” (164-165)

Willard Swartley ends chapter seven with this sentence: “Hear, O People: Jesus Christ is Lord and Victor. Praise be to the name of Jesus.” That is our hope in facing the Powers. This book is a helpful read along the way.

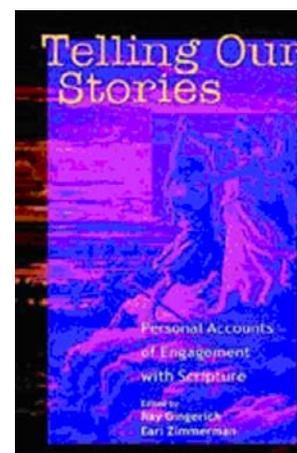
- reviewed by MSH

Telling our Stories: Personal Accounts of Engagement with Scripture

EDITED BY RAY GINGERICH AND EARL ZIMMERMAN, CASCADIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2006

“Virtually all the contributions to this volume are remarkably well-written and profoundly reflective. I hope this volume engenders new forms of communal exegesis capable of bringing about the transformation we all seek.” - Walter Wink in the Foreword

How does the church address differences? How can the struggle draw persons together rather than drive them apart? A new book, **Telling Our Stories: Personal Accounts of Engagement with Scripture**, explores these provocative questions as a diverse group of Mennonite pastors, administrators and teachers candidly tell their own



stories of engagement with the biblical narrative. The 288-page volume also describes a model for such engagement.

The book, co-published by Cascadia Publishing House and Herald Press, was co-edited by Ray C. Gingerich and Earl S. Zimmerman of Harrisonburg, Virginia. Dr. Gingerich, professor emeritus of Bible and religion at Eastern Mennonite University, taught undergraduate and seminary courses in theology, church history and ethics at EMU for nearly 30 years and helped lay the foundations for EMU's graduate Centre for Justice and Peacebuilding. Dr. Zimmerman is assistant professor of Bible and religion at EMU and pastor at Shalom Mennonite Congregation in Harrisonburg. He is author of *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics*, forthcoming from Cascadia.

"This is a great resource for small group studies, adult Sunday schools and undergraduate and seminary classrooms," co-editor Earl Zimmerman noted. Steve Carpenter, media columnist and Virginia Mennonite Conference administrator said of the book, "Like the vibrant voices of a mixed CD, *Telling Our Stories* blends the personal tales of nearly two dozen Mennonite pilgrims." "Here is the stuff of life, of memory, of growth, of peoplehood, of identity, the story of encounter with the word. . . and with the Word," added Loren L. Johns, dean of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.

"This stimulating book not only engages our interest but also provides a genuinely fresh approach to the demanding task of biblical interpretation." —Christopher D. Marshall, St. John's Senior Lecturer in Christian Theology, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Is it insensitive to share your faith?

JAMES R. KRABILL, GOOD BOOKS, 2005

This book is sub-titled "Hard questions about Christian mission in a plural world." I expected from the title and sub-title to find a hard-hitting exploration of evangelism and mission questions with questions thrown up by cynics and answers given by James from his years of experience involved in "overseas" mission. What I found instead is a gentle exploration of mission issues through storytelling. Krabill uses his experiences from twenty years of teaching Bible and church history among the African-initiated churches in Ivory Coast to help answer questions he comes across in his current position as Senior executive for Global ministries at Mennonite Mission Network (USA) and as a professor teaching mission courses at Goshen College, a Mennonite college in Indiana.

Krabill moves through the issues in a conversational style that is easy to read. But despite the simplicity in style and storytelling format, the book deals with some key

mission questions. Krabill lists ten questions that some of his students raised. Questions like "What is most important in missions – social action or evangelism?" "How does one present the gospel without imposing one's own cultural viewpoints?" "Is Jesus the only way?" And "What qualifications are required to be a missionary today?" He seeks to answer these questions in ten short chapters and presents four pages of other resources in a "For Further Reading" section at the end of the book.

While the book is written for a North American audience, it answers questions Christians in Australia and New Zealand also face. Krabill says "What I find...intriguing...is the degree to which we Christians are shaped by the all-pervasive values and perspectives of the current cultural context in which we live." (27) This is as true Down Under as it is in North America. Wherever we are, "brokenness" is a problem. Krabill says it is "a universal phenomenon...comprehensive in nature and scope." (45)

The answer God comes up with is a plan "to come to our rescue, to heal our brokenness, to bring peace out of conflict, and to make things right, once and for all, with the world." (46-47) How? Through Jesus and the *Shalom* he brings. God's master plan is a "*shalom*-making plan" through the "primary *Shalom*-maker" Jesus. The church has not always caught on to this holistic plan that God has for the world. "Somehow, over the years, the church preferred to have *shalom* chopped up in fragmented bits and pieces rather than embracing it as an integrated whole." (55)

But *shalom*-making is what the church is called to. Krabill shares a story from Ron Sider about Jesus and the archangel Gabriel talking about how God left this plan to a "ragtag bunch of fishermen, ex-prostitutes, and tax-collectors" after Jesus departed the earth.

"But what if they fail?" Gabriel persists with growing alarm. "What's your back-up plan?"

"There is no back-up plan," Jesus says quietly. (67-68)

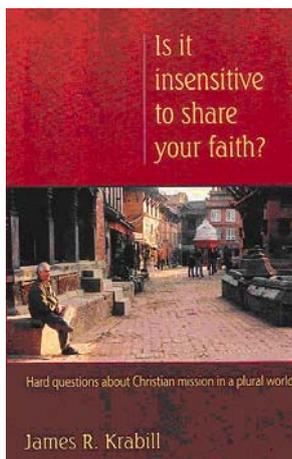
This is why Paul can say in Ephesians 3:10 it is "through the church that the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms will learn of God's wisdom in all its different forms." We in the church are "the back-up plan," there is no other. Krabill says:

"God took an enormous risk in choosing us as humans to be the primary agents for living out and getting out the word about his cosmic reconciliation project. The fact that we have not always done such a fabulous job at the assignment in no way changes the basic strategy God has put in place." (71)

This is where many in my generation, who grew up in a church where we were told our main task is to get people "saved," get really uncomfortable. We've moved beyond that and are wary of taking it up again. Krabill suggests:

"It probably wouldn't hurt us as God's people to spend more time talking about how to live our calling more faithfully. Particularly since our past performance hasn't always been too brilliant. And because – despite that rather sobering fact – God has apparently decided not to put an alternative, back-up plan in place. (71-72)

In a section called "Bringing it on home" Krabill says: "We need to take a closer look at the place where



God has planted us. For us the key question is what should be happening when God's Project comes into our cultural context? What parts of that culture can be carried over? What is no longer compatible with God's Shalom-making Plan and needs serious correction? What can be transformed to become of greater value in promoting God's cause in the world? And what has not even yet been created that is necessary for God's purposes to be fully realized?" (101)

One valuable aspect of this book is the reminder Krabill gives us that God is at work in the whole world – not just in Western countries. As a matter of fact we are now in the minority.

"We focus ever more narrowly on local agenda, constructing small-minded, culture-bound worldviews, nurturing individualized spiritualities, and growing increasingly out of touch with the religious trends shaping our planet. If we continue down this path, the outlook for our future is likely not too bright...we will almost certainly become marginalized by the stream of history and progressively irrelevant on the global scene, prattling on and on about self-important issues that matter less and less to more and more of the world's population. (127)

I don't know about you but I want to be a part of God's *Shalom*-making plan for the world. I don't want to be sidetracked by cultural traps along the way. Krabill's book is a timely reminder and encouragement to put these issues in the centre of our agenda as the church in Australia and New Zealand.

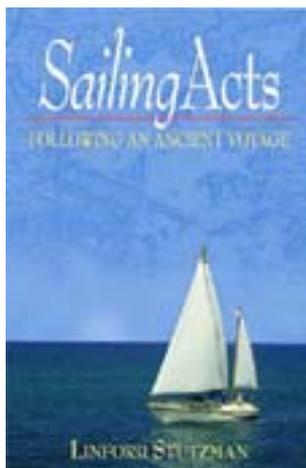
-Reviewed by MSH

SailingActs Following an Ancient Voyage LINFORD STUTZMAN, Good Books, 2006

Seafaring isn't for the faint of heart. It wasn't for the Apostle Paul in the first century A.D. - shipwrecked, imprisoned and often a stranger in foreign lands.

And it turned out to be a heart-stopping task some 2,000 years later when Linford Stutzman and his wife, Janet, undertook a 14-month journey by sailboat. The Stutzmans sailed 3,656 nautical miles to eight countries on their voyage, beginning May 2004 and ending August 2005, visiting every one of the 36 ports where Paul stopped on his tumultuous missionary journeys. The adventures and reflections of this trip are captured in a new book, **SailingActs: Following an Ancient Journey**, published by Good Books.

Dr. Stutzman, an associate professor of culture and mission at Eastern Mennonite Seminary and in the undergraduate Bible and religion department of Eastern Mennonite University, and Janet Stutzman, who is also employed by EMU's development department, made the



trip during a sabbatical from teaching. "Explorers are easy to admire or despise, but very difficult to understand without going on the trip," Stutzman writes at the beginning of **SailingActs**. "To really appreciate the experiences, the drama and development of Paul the explorer, you need to sail with him."

Stutzman draws thoughtful comparisons from his own travel mishaps and adventures to the ones Paul experienced on his journey. And, Stutzman's knowledge of the socio-political setting in the first-century Roman Empire provides an informative backdrop to understanding Paul and reading his epistles in a new light.

For more information on SailingActs, visit www.GoodBooks.com.

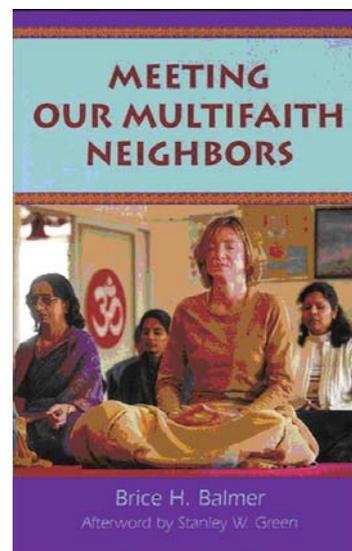
Meeting Our Multifaith Neighbors

BRICE H. BALMER, HERALD PRESS, 2006

Missional churches continually engage neighbours of different faiths, whether across the street or across the world. **Meeting Our Multifaith Neighbors** addresses some of the key issues for Christians who endeavour to be respectful of other religions as they share their own faith.

"Brice Balmer uses personal stories of the ecumenical experiences in the multifaith community where he works. Balmer cites biblical injunctions to build bridges to our neighbours of multifaith backgrounds. He supplies exhaustive information from cultural practice and religious observance to break down stereotypes between people of various faiths who now share the same space. Balmer's plea cannot be timelier." - Stanley W. Green, in the Afterword

Brice H. Balmer is chaplain at House of Friendship, a Christian non-profit human service agency that serves low-income people in Waterloo, Ontario, region. He has published many articles and produced a number of videos on poverty, homelessness, and other social issues.



Paul: In Fresh Perspective N. T. WRIGHT, FORTRESS PRESS 2005

Tom Wright's remarkable literary output continues apace. He seems to pen books faster than most people read them (this is the fourth book of his I have read this half year alone). And all the time, while pouring out scholarly and popular works on all manner of subjects, Wright continues beaver away at what will undoubtedly be his most enduring legacy – the multi-volume work *Christian Origins*

and the Question of God. The fourth installment in this series will be on the theology of Paul, and if the previous volumes are anything to go by, it will run to countless hundreds of pages. For those without the leisure or background to contend with such a massive treatment, an alternative is at hand in this little book simply called Paul.

Like his previous brief book on Paul (What St Paul Really Said), the present volume is based on a lecture series the author delivered at Cambridge University. That necessarily limits the scope of the material covered, although it does comprise a more rounded and balanced summary of Paul's thought than did his earlier book. Having said that, Wright approaches the job of giving an account of the apostle's theology in a rather different form to what we are accustomed to in standard theologies of Paul. Rather than attempting a systematic summary of the major ideas in Paul's mind, Wright offers what today is called a "reading" – a particular interpretive perspective on the overall direction and coherence of Paul's thought. It is a reading based on Wright's now familiar practice of locating early Christianity within an overarching second-Temple Jewish narrative of creation, covenant, exile and restoration.

The book falls into two parts. In Part I ("Themes"), Wright situates Paul in the four overlapping worlds of early Judaism, Hellenistic culture, Roman imperial control, and early Christianity. He proposes that Paul's theology represents, on the one hand, a radical reinterpretation of the Jewish themes of creation and covenant in light of his



conviction that the Messiah had come, and, on the other hand, a stark confrontation with paganism in general, and with Roman imperial ideology in particular. The latter point is particularly interesting. Along with a number of other scholars, Wright detects in Paul's writings a quite deliberate, and thoroughly Jewish, subversion, both explicit and implicit, of prevailing imperial propaganda and practice.

In Part II ("Structures") Wright organizes Paul's theology around three standard Jewish ideas – monotheism (with Paul's christological, and indeed pneumatological monotheism, entailing a radical redefinition of God), election (now focused on Jesus instead of Torah), and eschatology (with the future age now being inaugurated in Christ). In each case Paul's reworking of these themes is always rooted in scripture, always leads to a distinctive praxis, and nearly always deconstructs imperial pretensions.

Wright has produced an engaging and accessible entrée to the great apostle's thought. It is not a heavy weight academic tome and so should have wide appeal. But nor is it a beginner's guide. Some readers may find his frequent references to "new perspective" scholarship and his passing, almost allusive, replies to his own critics a bit confusing. But Wright has achieved what he sets out to do – "to let in some new shafts of light on Paul" – and he does this by so clearly locating Paul on the map both of early Judaism and of the wider Roman empire.

- Reviewed by Chris Marshall

The Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc.

The purposes of the Association are:

- To nurture and support the Christian faith of individuals and groups in Australia and New Zealand who identify with the Anabaptist tradition.
- To network and link individuals, churches and groups of Christians who share a common Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith.
- To provide religious services including teaching, training, pastoral care, mediation, and counsel to its members and others interested in the Anabaptist tradition.
- To provide resources and materials relating to the tradition, perspectives, and teaching of Anabaptists to both the Christian and general public.
- To convene conferences and gatherings which provide opportunity for worship, teaching, training, consultation, celebration, and prayer in the Anabaptist tradition.
- To extend the awareness of Anabaptism in Australia and New Zealand assisting individuals, churches and groups discover and express their links with the Anabaptist tradition.
- To provide an opportunity for affiliation for churches and groups who wish to be known in Australia and New Zealand as Anabaptists.

What is Anabaptism?

Anabaptism is a radical Christian renewal movement that emerged in Europe during the sixteenth-century Reformation. Whilst Anabaptism was a grassroots movement with diverse expressions in its early development, its enduring legacy usually has included the following:

- Baptism upon profession of faith
- A view of the church in which membership is voluntary and members are accountable to the Bible and to each other
- A commitment to the way of peace and other teachings of Jesus as a rule for life
- Separation of church and state
- Worshipping congregations which create authentic community and reach out through vision and service

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