

ON THE ROAD

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Heaven, Hell & New Creation

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From the Editor



Nathan Hobby

Welcome to this Australasian exploration of heaven, hell and new creation from an Anabaptist perspective.

These things—‘eschatology’, as theologians call them—deeply affect our understanding of how

to live. Given my own preoccupation with these questions, I’ve been so glad to gather together these contributions.

You’ll find considerable diversity among our contributors, with some reaching opposite conclusions on a couple of things. I think one of the wonderful things about AAANZ is our ability to live with such diversity and even celebrate it.

New This Issue

There’s a lot of people with interesting things to say who don’t have the time or inclination to write an article. That’s why this issue features our first ‘vox-pop’, giving a chance for short responses to the topic on hand. They are highly readable and highly interesting.

Also this issue we start a news section. AAANZ members and friends are up to so many interesting things, and OTR is one forum for keeping up to date with them. Please send me news about events coming up, events already held or just life and ministry in your neck of the woods.

Next Issue

In our next issue, we’re exploring Anabaptist responses to the Old Testament.

Suggestions for articles:

- How do you use the Psalms in worship and prayer?
- What do the Ancient Israelites have to teach us today?
- How do you understand the Canaanite genocide and other instances of violence commanded by God?

The deadline is 7 June 2010. Non-themed submissions are always welcome too. Please email submissions to nathanhobby@gmail.com.

The view from Ephesians 4

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

Mark and Mary Hurst, AAANZ staffworkers



Kiwi singer Dave Dobbyn sings in "Welcome Home":

Out here on the edge the empire is fading by
the day and the world is so weary in war
maybe we'll find that new way.

Living on the edge of empire is a challenge. We need each other's help to faithfully follow Jesus in this war-weary world. This was a topic several AAANZ members discussed recently while attending the Passionfest festival in New Zealand. We are looking ahead to February 2011 when AAANZ will gather in New Zealand for its next conference. Watch these pages over the next year for more details about dates, speakers and theme of this bi-national gathering.

Urban Vision (UV) folks hosted us during our Kiwi visit. On their website (www.urbanvision.org.nz) they say:

We are a contemporary Order following Jesus on the margins... a group of households and ministries in Wellington, Porirua and the Kapiti Coast who focus on building life-giving relationships with those on the margins of mainstream society, and doing justice in the midst of urban poverty. We've come to realise we're a local expression of a global revolution of hope and transformation, worked out in the neighbourhoods of need we've relocated to.

They live, work, and worship "on the margins" – on the edges of society. We came away from our visit refreshed and encouraged. Their commitment to live together in community while serving in Jesus' name is contagious.

This month we are officially kicking off a new community venture in northern Sydney with a "Home

Blessing." At this point, we are calling ourselves the "1643 Community: An Anabaptist Community of Hospitality and Peace." It is an attempt to be an incarnational presence where we are. Our goals include:

- Be a place of hospitality by hosting individuals and small groups
- Be a place of peace by modelling peaceable relationships
- Be a place of spirituality by having regular times of worship and prayer
- Be a place of learning by hosting workshops and seminars
- Be a place of resources by sharing books and audio-visual material

As part of our attempt to put down some roots in this area of Sydney, we are also taking on a part-time pastoral role in a local church. Along with Wendell Berry, we think plugging in locally is important. He writes:

What impact does place/community have upon the way we choose to live our lives? What impact does our location have upon the things that we value/esteem? These are questions that I've been pondering significantly over the last several months . . . A community, unlike a public, has to do first of all with belonging; it is a group of people who belong to one another and to their place. (*Sex Economy Freedom and Community*, 147-148)

God bless you as you put down roots and seek to live faithfully on the edge of empire.

- 5 March 2010

A Festival For Passionate People

President's Report

Doug Sewell, AAANZ President



I was told to bring a small tent and sleeping mat with me to Passionfest. When I got to Wellington, New Zealand, at the end of February and to Ngatiawa camp near Waikanae I found I did not need them. Instead I was given a comfy bench in the library at the Urban Vision retreat house. The collection of books on theology, church history and mission made it tough getting a good nights sleep. I felt like a kid in a lolly shop with over-choice. What to read in a short busy weekend?

The Passionfest program promised speakers from both sides of the Tasman with workshops, music, festivity, artists, and activists. Not just two or three activists but a large number involved with urban kids, prison ministry, peace work and many other areas.

I settled on the first night for a small book *The Sounds of Worlds Colliding*. Its preface began:

All of us live with hopes and dreams about how life could be better. For many that usually means how things could be better for me. But there are others, in light of the

present day realities of global poverty, marginalisation and oppression who dream that this world can and should be a better place.

The book traces the stories of small bands of Christian missionaries living in Asia. Known as Servants to Asia's Poor, the teams embed themselves in slum communities. Servants seeks to model the incarnational values of hope, transformation, healing and empowerment. At the festival I met some passionate people from Servants and also from a lot of other Christian communities engaged in living as radical disciples of Jesus. The Passionfest slogan taken from Martin Luther's words made a whole lot of sense for these folks: "The passion of Christ should not be acted out in words and pretense, but in real life".

One Anabaptist core conviction is to make reconciliation the centre of our work. I was finding at Passionfest many people who were living in an Anabaptist way whilst they did not yet know they



were an expression of Anabaptism at heart. I enjoyed alongside Mark and Mary Hurst affirming our mutual connectedness and providing an historical context for their convictions in the wider geography of God's Kingdom.

Next year, AAANZ, Urban Vision and other Kiwis will be hosting an Anabaptist Conference just before Passionfest 2011. One AAANZ member at Passionfest quoted Dave Dobbyn's song "Welcome Home" that has the lines 'Out here on the edge the empire is fading by the day and the world is so weary in war maybe we'll find that new way.' He suggested a conference theme around living faithfully in the midst of, or on the edge of, empire and we got talking about Post-Christendom and that led us to invite Stuart Murray Williams of the Anabaptist Network in the United Kingdom who will come to speak on his new book, *Naked Anabaptism*.

Stay tuned for more information and make a mental note to come to Wellington mid-February 2011 to the Anabaptist Conference and also to Passionfest afterwards.



News



Updates from Anabaptists

Peace Tree Update



Greetings from sunny Perth! We have been reminded daily in the last few months of the need for the earth's redemption. At the moment we have a great dumpster diving roster, where we can take the waste from the bins of large corporations and use it to cook feasts for us and our neighbours. The feasts bring us much joy, but the amount of food we collect saddens us when we think of those who don't have enough.

The community garden is a hub of activity. We were just awarded a large grant to start an initiative called "Permablitz"—where we can make permaculture principles accessible to those who don't have money or skills. The pizza oven is getting a good workout once a month when Harry gives a workshop on different aspects of permaculture. Our plans to start a food co-op are moving along, we are now sourcing bulk foods and containers as well as thinking about grinders and bottling on a large scale. Josh has also started a fruit and vegetable run to the farmer's markets for us and local families to get good quality (and cheap!) produce.

After a year or so of resting from major decisions and commitments, we are now moving forward into a

time of planning for the next few years. We are looking at co-operatives and owning property, a possible rural branch of Peace Tree and how to support activism and existing links in East Timor (very close to Amy and Josh's heart particularly). Apart from that our numbers are at an all-time high (fourteen at the moment), with many other people who interact with us and support us—including another Christian community close by. It's been great to have so much energy to work on all these projects and feel like we are supported in what we are trying to do.

We would love to have Anabaptist or other people stay; please contact us if you are planning to come to Perth, at least for a meal or a cuppa.

- Amy Fitzpatrick

Peace Tree is an intentional Christian community influenced by the Anabaptist tradition and based in Lockridge, one of Perth's poorer suburbs.

- Editor



Irene's Place: Community Plant

Irene's Place is currently seeking to discern what God may be calling us to. We have had four interns from the USA (coming through the Radical Journey program connected to Mennonite Mission Network) working with us for the last six months. These young women have volunteered in schools, community organizations and around the church. We have learned much through this partnership with Radical Journey but we are sensing God encouraging us in a new direction and we are working to clarify that.

You have heard of church plants – well, we are calling for a community plant! We are seeking to gather a group of mission-minded people to live in community in Canberra. We need people who are passionate about living out faith. This is not necessarily a call to go to the least of these or the poor (though we have both in our neighbourhood). It is a call to speak truth to power; to live a simple and sustained life in the face of wealth. To choose prayer and communal worship in a city that rewards long hours and that takes literally that time is money. This is a call to welcome the stranger who lives next door, the person who just moved in from Adelaide, Perth, or Indonesia. To

take the time for cups of tea and dinners, time to chat while watering our garden plots next to each other in the community garden. A chance to live in the middle of the capital city which gives us a chance to talk to the guys living in the flats down the street who struggle with mental illness that or walk up the hill to talk to a politician about why we should care about the world's poor. Asking amid the towering public service buildings how we live out God's peaceable kingdom. Having the daily conversation; asking what does it mean to live and work in faith? This is a call to work with the lonely; a call to befriend and challenge those with large disposable incomes. A call to work out what it means to live in God's shalom in this city.

We would appreciate prayers and any words of wisdom as we continue to discern where God is calling us. If anyone is interested in joining this kind of a project we encourage you to contact us for further conversation.

- Moriah Hurst, moriah@canbap.org

Conference in Melbourne: Atonement, Nonviolence & Abuse

The Evangelical Alliance is partnering with the AAANZ to present 'Can't Get No Satisfaction: Atonement, Nonviolence & Abuse', a conference to be held at Ridley College in Melbourne from Friday 21 May to Saturday 22 May.

The speakers are Graham Cole, Chris Marshall, Geoff Broughton, Fiona Dawn Hill, Ian Packer, Barb Deutschmann and Jarrod McKenna.

Organiser and AAANZ Executive member Ian Packer says the idea for the conference partly came

out of debate about the nonviolence of God at the 2009 AAANZ Conference in Melbourne.

The conference includes the launch of Graham Cole's book, *God the Peacemaker*, published by IVP.

The cost of the conference is \$125 (\$75 concession) for both days, \$100 Saturday only or \$25 for Friday night only. Registrations close 14 May on the Evangelical Alliance website, www.ea.org.au.

Quotes on Heaven, Hell & New Creation

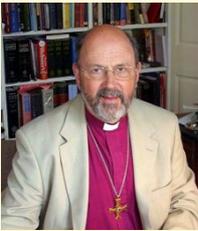
The Bible ends with God coming here



One of the most tragic things to ever happen to the gospel was the emergence of the message that Jesus takes us somewhere else if we believe in him. The Bible ends with God coming here. God, in the midst of people who can imagine nothing better, celebrating the life that we all share.

- Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p. 171.

The point of life now!



You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that's about to fall over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that's shortly going to be thrown in the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that's about to be dug up for a building

site. You are - strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrection itself - accomplishing something which will become, in due course, part of God's new world. Every act of love, gratitude and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings, and for that matter one's fellow non-human creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed which spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honoured in the world - all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation which God will one day make. That is the logic of the mission of God. God's recreation of his wonderful world, which has begun with the resurrection of Jesus and continues mysteriously as God's people live in the risen Christ and in the power of his Spirit, means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted. It will last all the way into God's new world. In fact, it will be enhanced there.

- Tom Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 219.

Fulfillment



Human effort is meaningful because what God is going to do will be the fulfillment of human efforts, of human history. And yet, because earth will be destroyed in its being fulfilled, no goal that we can fix, no product that we can bring forth, is itself ultimate.

- John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, p. 255.

One answer to the Rapture

Interpret the marginal themes by reference to the major themes... In order to get to the fringes of the Bible... to the book of Revelation in the New Testament, we have to move from the centre. In the Gospels, while there is reference to the return of Christ, there is very little detail about the rapture, a thousand year kingdom, a restored Jerusalem or the many other details you will find if you read the Book of Revelation with a millennialist interpretation.

- John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, p. 271.

Why hasn't Jesus returned yet?



The teaching of Jesus and of his followers after him contains the hope of the full coming of the end of history as we know it, with the winding up of history, the last judgement and the transformation of the universe. This hope is envisaged as being fulfilled in

the near future, although it is fair to say that a precise period within which it must happen is never delineated... Does the long lapse of time signify that what we thought was the arrival of the kingdom of God in the mission of Jesus has been wrongly interpreted, and Jesus is nothing more than a good teacher who was deluded (like his followers) into thinking that he was God's agent to change the world?

This is perhaps one of the two most powerful objections to the truth of Christianity (the other, of course, being the problem of evil, which is perhaps ultimately the same problem - why doesn't God act more quickly to bring an end to suffering and death?).

- I.H. Marshall, "Eschatology at the Heart of New Testament Theology" in *What Are We Waiting For?*, p. 41.

Vox Populi

The Voice of the People on... Hell

For many Anabaptists, traditional Christian doctrines of hell (everlasting punishment/ separation from God) are in tension with an emphasis on non-violence. **So the question is, what do you think about hell?**

Geoff Westlake

I believe there's a hell, but:

- it's other dimensional (beyond time and space)
- it's 'like a fire' but the weight of New Testament passages suggests that it consumes people (thus annihilation), and eternally torments devil and demons. [The one uncomfortable exception to this is Matt 25.]
- if it's torment, it's like 'outer darkness, gnashing teeth' which to me depicts an awareness of missing out, but refusal to admit it.
- but people get hell because they deliberately want separation from God.
- Who goes there? God is a good judge, judging people according to the amount of light they have received, and how they have responded faithfully to it (ala Romans 4).

Karlin Love

For me, it would be being forced to try on clothes: an endless line of MYER change rooms!
More seriously...there isn't a real strong case for Hell being a major human destination is there? (I'm not going to defend this at the moment). Is anyone re-viewing NT Wright's *Surprised by Hope*? He takes it on there.

Chris Summerfield

Hell in the Old Testament

Firstly the word "Hell" does not appear in the OT. If your Bible does have the word hell it is translating the Hebrew word Sheol. Sheol is not the fiery pit that we usually think hell to be. Instead, Sheol is a place of the dead, what we might describe today as 'the grave'. It is certainly a horrible place and one to be avoided but it is not the lake of fire and demons torturing for eternity that we often think of.

In Genesis, the result of leaving the garden was not the eternal torment of hell but rather plain death. I wonder if we have forgotten how bad it is simply to die. I can remember hearing an atheist being quoted as describing death as "a cold wind then nothing". As much as Dante's levels of hell sound terrible the simple "a cold wind then nothing" sounds even worse to me. At least hell is existence; nothing to me would be more horrible than non-existence.

- from <http://achurchlessfaith.blogspot.com>



Danny Klopovic

Growing up in a Catholic family, I learnt early on about Hell. One particular moment stands out for me – I was about 8 years old - where I remember asking my grandmother about Hell. She replied that the Devil and “very, very bad people” were there. I remember being puzzled as to why anyone was there and I asked what could people do that was so bad? Her only response was to say that if I was a good boy and said my nightly prayers, I should not worry about such things.

Fast forward a few years to my late teen years where I had decided that being an atheist was the best option. I did not find the Catholicism of my youth to be credible – partly due to what I considered to be the morally revolting notion of Hell. Discussions with others, particularly those from an evangelical background who told stories of watching lurid Christian movies about the Last Days and the fate of the wicked to be endlessly burning in agony only served to confirm my revulsion.

Another few years passing – I had learned about Anabaptism and read in my explorations an article by a Seventh-day Adventist theologian arguing that the Seventh-day Adventist church was an Anabaptist church. As it turned out, there was a local SDA church only a block away from my home so I started attending and would continue to do so for the next few years. Although I was already familiar with the notion of conditional immortality, it was with the SDAs that I had extensive discussions about conditionalist views and its superiority to traditional notions of everlasting punishment. Yet I was never convinced that it was indeed superior. Like the evangelicals I knew, my SDA friends also told me similar stories about Last Day scenarios and how it was the fate of the wicked to suffer terribly in the flames before being finally annihilated.

It has been years in the making but I have come, rather recently, to the conclusion that as an Anabaptist Christian, the practice of enemy-love is simply incompatible with either the traditional view of eternal punishment or conditionalist / annihilationist views. I suggest that the logic of Anabaptist thought here requires both a rejection of the violent God and these alternatives – leading to a universalist conclusion. Whilst I do think that divine judgment is a reality, I suggest that it is restorative in nature and thus the final reconciliation of all is to be anticipated.

Rowan Ford

Thank you for examining this issue. I find it very valuable to do so. I find the traditional doctrine of hell very difficult, but I don't want to do a hatchet job on Scripture just to suit my own preference. So if I can find a way through the confused mess of my own mind, that distorts my view of God and my enthusiasm for his ways, I would be glad.

I acknowledge the need for justice to be done, but I have problems with:

1. The punishment doesn't fit the crime, in its severity or duration (ie. it's unspeakably cruel and an endless punishment for a crime committed within time).
2. What it says about the character of God: 'I love you unconditionally but if you don't love me back you'll be tortured forever.' It seems monstrous that God will consign the bulk of his human creation to endless, excruciating torture and conscious pain. What does that prove? Arguments about God being so holy that endless torture is right, fitting and perfect don't convince me about God's goodness.
3. It seems to suggest that humans can forgive more than God, because humans can eventually forgive and break the cycle of violence, so why wouldn't God?



The Silence About Hell

By David Griffin



Botticelli's drawing of the entrance to hell.

As one who has followed with both practical and academic interest all things Anabaptist since being one of the first Australian subscribers to *Sojourners* (when dinosaurs roamed the earth), I always read *On The Road* with interest. I stand in the breach – equally centred between the classical and radical Christian traditions. What causes me to write for this *On The Road* (never having done so before) is the time to do so as well as the subject matter of eschatology, and more particularly Nathan Hobby's brave mention of the current forbidden word – hell.

But perhaps we think of hell as too harsh for PLU's (people like us), but not for others. When Amrozzi was sentenced to death for the Bali bombings, Sydney's tabloid paper had a front page photo caption, "Laughing all the way to hell," a clear rebuttal of his martyr theology. Hell screamed outside every newsagent and on every newsstand in NSW. It appears easy to promote hell in a spirit of vengeance against the enemy, but hard to direct it against PLU's

One of the most curious aspects of those who call themselves Anabaptists is the silence about hell. It is curious because with such a strong christological theology grounded in the gospels, it may well amount to selective editorial elision of those parts of the text which appear unpalatable to our preconceived moral commitments.

This is particularly a problem as Anabaptists continually accuse mainstream Christianity of softening or eliding those parts of the Jesus-narrative that are inconvenient to magisterial or culture-captive Christianity, such as peace and non-violence. After all, Jesus spoke quite a bit about hell.

Paul speaks comparatively less of hell than Jesus, although he does speak of judgment quite a deal. This is due to his strong sense of eschatology and the future reign of Christ. The three options about hell open for Anabaptists are the same as for all Christians: elide hell altogether due to other theological convictions which trump it (for example grace in Barth, or love in Hick), recast the tradition in



Bosch's Fall of the Damned

favour of conditional immortality or annihilationism (as traditionally do Jehovah's Witnesses, and now an increasing number of evangelicals), or allow it to stand in all its starkness.

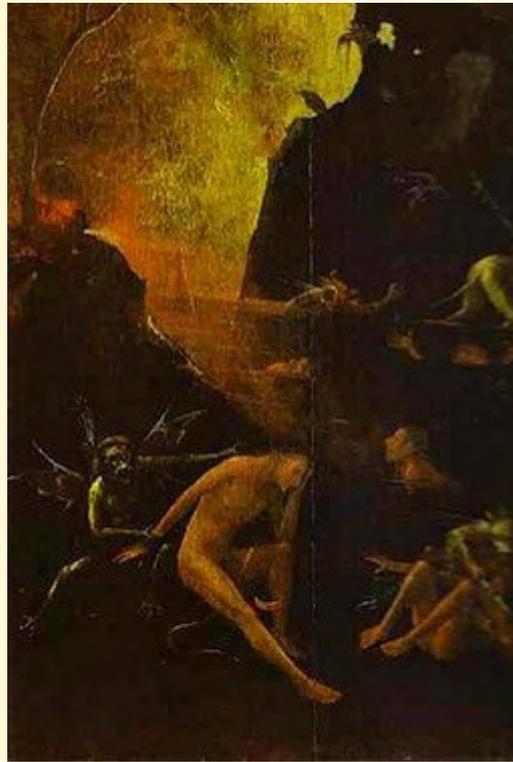
As Anabaptism has tended to be biblicist and somewhat one-dimensional in its gospel text hermeneutics, eschewing convoluted interpretations that appear to reflect prior cultural assumptions and the desire to fit the text into those worldly assumptions (see Bonhoeffer's accusations of culture-captive German Lutheranism in *The Cost of Discipleship*), it stands to reason that hermeneutical consistency would require a simple acceptance of hell, as portrayed. After all, we take with a rather one-dimensional attitude the Sermon on the Mount, seeking to avoid all the embarrassing ecclesial schemes that neuter its demands.

Those of us with Anabaptist commitments probably find ourselves caught in a dilemma, insisting that Jesus meant what he said when he commanded us to love our enemies, but didn't when he warned of hell. Such acceptance of hell does not imply a wooden literalism of course, but it does imply a non-embarrassment about the issue. In my preaching experience, I am interested to note that the simple "Christ is the way to heaven" is applauded as a straight and clear statement of true hope, whereas "Hell is for real" is often rejected as too straight and stark, not sufficiently nuanced, or even harsh and cruel. Yet the text states both "God is love," (1 Jn.

4:16), and "...you make him twice a son of hell as you are," (Matt. 23:15). The tendency to massage the unpalatable, in the way that Blair was accused of sexing-up the Iraq threat, is perhaps a temptation we all face. Could it be true that the desire to make it (the text, Jesus, the gospel) broadly acceptable is, at root, a desire to make ourselves socially acceptable, which is the primal sin of pride?

If someone is appointed lecturer in Egyptology, yet consistently avoids a key aspect of Egyptian history and culture because it is both unpalatable to contemporary students and contradictory to her own moral convictions, it may be argued that she is committing a type of intellectual fraud upon her students. Whether she likes or approves of the matter is irrelevant: she is appointed to teach Egyptology in all its greatness and failures, and teach it she must. This, I believe is where all Christians, Anabaptist included, tend to falter. We fall too often at the first hurdle which confronts the moral vision and discourse of our personal social milieu, whether sectarian or otherwise. However, as Yoder would suggest, the moral vision of Jesus is confronting to the wider world.

Perhaps our hesitation is due to our sense that hell smacks of retributive rather than restorative or distributive justice. Yet such ethical bipolarity is untenable. It is naïve to assume that restorative or distributive justice is more Christ-like than retributive – unless of course one circularly omits the very



Bosch's Hell

retributive gospel texts themselves. Furthermore, Anabaptism's strong sense of voluntary faith and its rejection of classical Calvinism suggests that human choice be allowed to stand in all its full responsibility. We believe that Christian soldiers cannot take refuge behind either "following orders" or their vocational role as agents of the state, and thus slide out from under Jesus' clear command to love one's enemies. Likewise, those for whom Christ is odious, objectionable or irrelevant cannot be granted the space to slide out from personal responsibility for their own unbelief and its final consequences. To do so is to patronise them – to not allow them as cogent adults to bear the consequences of their own actions. Patronising theology is, I believe, a very contemporary temptation, especially for older male Christians, who are in danger of becoming misty-eyed sentimentalists more than many others.

It is of course one thing to prefer to not speak of hell, and another to theologially reject it. It ought to drive us to prayer and mission. To accept its reality is neither to delight in it, wish it upon the enemies of the gospel or to use it as an unhealthy scare tactic. However, it is of interest that health authorities use scare tactics in advertising, such as the anti-smoking ads which feature aortas clogged with fat, the vomiting anti binge-drinking ads and the blood and gore car crash ads. If these ads have a valid place in moral persuasion, perhaps scare tactics are OK after all. Whether such an approach works is debatable, and is not the point of my argument. To argue

pragmatically "It does not work" presumes a greater wisdom than Jesus, just as the hawks accuse Christian peace-making doves as naïve and non-realistic in a violent world. It is also a form of non-Christological, consequentialist or proportionalist moral reasoning. In contrast, proper Christological moral reasoning is a function of the prior commitment to unembarrassed textual fidelity.

My own feeling is that Jesus' hell-rhetoric works at the very least as a simple scare tactic: "Whatever you do, don't end up there!" The stark and awful images (far less stark and brutal than the vast majority of youthful movie images and many song lyrics) are meant to be off-putting and horrible, just as in apocalyptic, a favourite Anabaptist genre.

A parallel may illustrate. When I mention to evangelicals that Jesus is not actually a model or ground for ethics in the vast majority of the Christian tradition, they usually gasp in horror. They find this difficult to believe - until I mention that the majority tradition approves of Christians fighting in wars, despite Jesus commanding us to love our enemies. At that point the penny drops and they go silent, for they realize that what I describe is true also for them. Anabaptists must be careful not to be the same.

David is pursuing Th.D. studies in natural law and christological ethics, although currently enjoying a brief suspension of candidature to allow him to finish other matters.

Care for Creation

Paul's Theology of Cosmic Redemption

By Christopher Marshall



Excerpt from "Paul and Social Responsibility", published in Annal 17/1 (2000), 7-18.

In my experience, one of the most common reasons why Christians, especially conservative Christians, are so uninterested in issues of social or ecological justice is the strange belief that God intends ultimately to destroy the planet in judgment. The work of the cross saves souls, but human social structures and the material environment in general are destined for *replacement*, not for redemption. Paul's is the gospel of individual salvation but environmental destruction. But nothing could be more untrue to Paul than this idea. For right at the centre of his great epistle to the Romans, Paul asserts the redemption of the entire created order.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we

do not see, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:18-25).

The Bible has a paradoxical view of creation. On the one hand, creation sings the glories of God; it reveals the grandeur of its Creator. But on the other hand, all is not well in the garden. Creation has fallen into disorder; it is less than God intends it to be. In Romans 8, Paul pictures the disorder of creation as a combination of three things: frustration, corruption and pain (vv.20-21). It is not just humankind, but creation at large that is in bondage to the effects of sin. Suffering, sickness, death, violence and destruction afflict the whole created order. And yet without minimising its reality or its intensity, Paul is able to view this affliction in positive terms. The sufferings of creation are like a woman's labour pains, intense but temporary, heralding the dawn of a new creation. This is why the whole passage shot through with a sense of hope and promise, a joyous confidence in future. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (v.18).

What is this hope for the future, this "glory about to be revealed to us"? Nothing less than the restoration of the entire created order to a condition freed from frustration, death, suffering and decay.

Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in



labour pains [for this to happen] until now
(vv. 21-22).

Paul does not speak of the destruction of created order and its replacement with something new. Rather he speaks of its *liberation* from present slavery to become what God always intended it to be. God does not intend to trash the earth! It has a glorious future. Material creation will share with humanity in the redemption Christ has wrought. And the certainty of this inspires Paul with great hope. He can view present pain positively because knows for certain that change is coming, freedom is assured.

But how does he know? How can Paul be so certain? For Paul, it is not just wishful thinking. It is based on the concrete experience of what, in v.23, he calls “the first fruits” of ultimate redemption. Interestingly, in his writings Paul uses the notion of “the first-fruits” of redemption in connection with three things (all of which are implicit in Romans 8):

The first is **the resurrection of Jesus**. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul describes Jesus’ bodily resurrection as “the first fruits of those who have died”, the first installment of the general resurrection (1 Cor 15.20, 23). We *know* that God plans to restore the *material* creation because God raised Jesus’ *material body* from the dead (hence the empty tomb). People often misunderstand the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection. It is significant not simply because it proves there is life after bodily death but because it inaugurates a new form of bodily life free from subjection to death and decay. “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom 6:9-10). The bodily (or material) nature of Christ’s resurrection serves as the first fruits and guarantee of the ultimate redemption of the bodily (or material) order as a whole. That is why in v.23 Paul says we can await with confidence “the redemption of our bodies”. What happened to Christ will also happen to us.

The second kind of “first fruits” is **the gift of Spirit** (Rom 8:23). For Paul, the Christian age is, above all else, the age of the Holy Spirit. The eschatological gift of the Spirit achieves liberation from the power of sin and the rule of the law, and brings about an inner moral and spiritual renewal, a profound sense of God’s love, and a new immediacy of communication with God. But all this represents only “the first-fruits” of what is to come. The “glorious liberty” that God’s children now experience in inner their lives and relationships will eventually spill over to the “glorification” of their material bodies as well.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will *give life to your mortal bodies also* through his Spirit that dwells in you. (8.11)

The third application of “first fruits” in Paul’s writings is to **the community of faith**. In 2 Thessalonians 2.13, Paul describes the church as the “first fruits for salvation” (cf. Rom 11:16). The church, the body of Christ, is the first installment of redeemed humanity, a *new* kind of human community in which the injustices based on class, gender and race are to be transcended (Gal 3:28). The same thought is present in Romans 8: “creation itself will be set free...and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God ” (v.21). Take note: creation will share in the liberation which God’s children have begun to experience and will eventually know in fullness.

It is these three concrete realities — Christ’s resurrection, the gift of Spirit, and the existence of the church — that give Paul his irrepressible hope and courage in face of the present distress that afflicts God’s world. Present agonies are, to the eye of faith, the labour pains of a new, transformed order. The pain is real, but it is also temporary and transitional. A day of liberation is coming, for all that God has made.

Once again, inherent in this way of looking at the world is a clear social—and environmental—justice



mandate. Romans 8 calls on believers to recognise their solidarity with suffering creation, and God's solidarity with them both and with all that suffers. It is a solidarity of need, a solidarity of hope and a solidarity of destiny. Christians are not saved *out of* the world, but *in* the world, and *with* the world, indeed *for* the world. All creation will share in our glorious destiny of redemption. This calls for a spirituality that explores and celebrates the unique bond that exists between Christian believers and the wider creation. It also calls for a Christian ethics that sees in Christian hope a powerful motivation for social involvement. Paul's account of the redemption of creation is certainly intended to inspire hope in his readers. But it is also intended to incite action, to inspire deeds that are consistent with our future hope for a renewed earth, free from destruction, violence and injustice. Just as faith without works is dead, so hope without action is, simply, hopeless! Hope is more than an attitude of otherworldly optimism. Hope finds feet in deeds of commitment that both anticipate (or point towards) what we hope for, and even, in the grace of God, contribute towards its realisation. W.S. Towner captures this point well:

We need to think very, very clearly about the future of nature and the role we are to play in that future. If that future is going to be characterized by wholeness, we have to work hard for it now. Like magnets, the peaceable kingdom and the other idealistic visions of a perfected nature pull us toward them...because they have moral authority. They enable us to engage in proleptic action now. If peace is the hallmark of the new age (Isa 11.1-9), then our work in this time of tribulation is to abolish war and to effect reconciliation between people, as well as between people, wolves, and snakes. If abundance of life, taken now to mean both quality of life and bio-diversity, is manifested in the Eden ahead (Ezek 34:25-31), then we can do nothing better now than to attend to the rain forests (Gen 2.5,15), cut back on over-consumption, and limit the

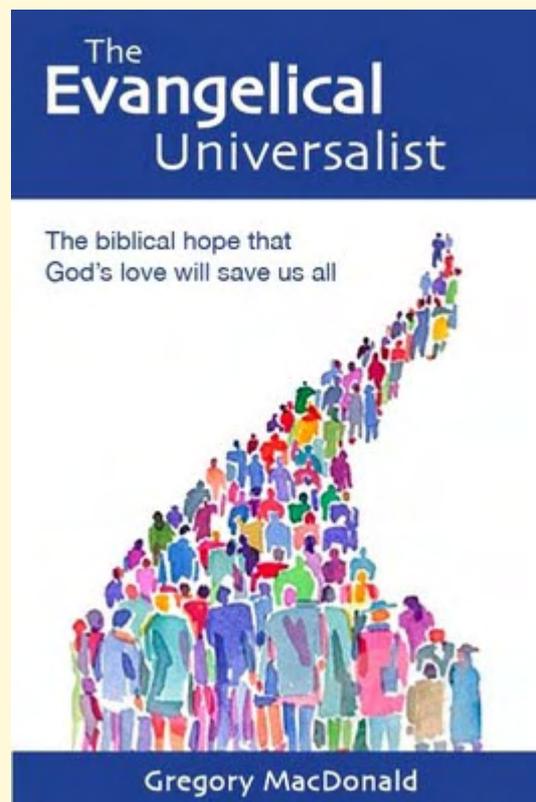
growth of the human population. We will continue to use nature, of course, but no longer threaten to use it up. If the nature that lies along the banks of the River of Life is spotlessly beautiful (Ezek 47.1-12; Rev 22.1-2), then our path to action turns away from waste, pollution, using up the earth's resources, and everything else that makes for ugliness and chaos. The biblical pictures of nature in the future function as incitements toward a style of ethical living in the present that is holistic, interdependent, non-hierarchical, and one that does not reject flesh and matter as corrupt because God does not reject them.

In undertaking such actions, Christians will join forces with other people of good will. Our actions will often be similar. But our understanding of what we are doing, and why we are doing it, will be different. Christians should care for the environment, oppose militarism and avoid waste as a witness to and a celebration of God's passionate love for all God has made and of God's promise to put right all that has gone wrong on earth. Of course human action, on its own, will not bring about the new creation; that is God's work which God will accomplish in God's own good time. But that fact is not meant to paralyse us, to render us mere spectators on God's work in world. Our deeds of justice will act as concrete demonstrations of what God is going to do, and, in fact is already doing even now (partly through us).

On Paul's emphasis on the Spirit, see G.D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson 1994); see also my essay, "For Me to Live is Christ": Pauline Spirituality as a Basis for Ministry", in Douglas A. Campbell (ed.), *The Call to Serve: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Ministry* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 96-116. W.S. Towner, "The Future of Nature", *Interpretation* 50/1 (1996), 33.

Will God's Love Save Us All?

A Review Article



The Evangelical Universalist

Gregory MacDonald (SPCK, 2007)

Reviewed by Nathan Hobby

Years ago for my first year theology class, I read *Four Views On Hell*, edited by William Crockett. The alternatives offered were literal flames, metaphoric flames but eternal conscious torment, annihilationism, and a Catholic explanation of purgatory. I was convinced by Clark Pinnock's idea of annihilationism or conditional immortality. It contends that we are only made immortal through God's intervention, and the fate of those who reject God is extinction – not eternal punishment but non-existence.

It is a view that has some scriptural support, taking seriously the idea in the New Testament that without Christ we will perish, that death is the fate of those who have not found salvation. If not hopeful, it at

least eased my conscience; the thought of an eternal torture chamber continuing on underneath the new creation is not only distressing but contradictory. (Just recently I read the objection that annihilationists are actually claiming that eternal capital punishment is kinder than life imprisonment—an interesting quandary.)

An option not presented in *Four Views of Hell*, indeed an option that few evangelicals consider open to them is of hell as restorative punishment – or, to use a word evangelicals tend to be scared of – universalism.

Perhaps evangelicals' hostility to universalism can be gauged by the fact that a 2007 book called *The Evangelical Universalist* was published under a pseudonym, taken from two famous universalists – Gregory of Nyssa and George MacDonald. The author is the head of an evangelical publishing house and he didn't want to see his publishing house and his other books dismissed as heretical. On his blog, Gregory Mac-

Donald promised us that he wasn't John MacArthur, nor Rick Warren, nor (more plausibly) Greg Boyd. In August 2009 he finally did reveal his identity: Robyn Parry, head of Paternoster, a British evangelical author held in high regard in the scholarly world.

Central to MacDonald's theological case for universalism is that God desires to save every person and that God, being omnipotent, can cause this to happen. Calvinists will tend to deny that God wants to save every person, and Arminians will tend to deny that God can overrule each person's free will choice to reject him. For me, I needed no convincing to believe that God wants to save every person. But what about the pervasive idea that God respects human freedom enough to allow them to reject him – forever?

MacDonald points out that any reasonable person who actually tasted separation from God in hell would choose again. Indeed, I think that if people on Earth genuinely believed that hell waited for them after death, they would choose to accept God's offer of salvation. I suspect most people don't reject Christianity wilfully, but because their experience of it leaves them unconvinced of its truth. Any person who does wilfully choose hell is so twisted and irrational that their 'freedom' to choose is hardly true freedom. MacDonald writes:

Hence, if God respects the freedom of those in hell and permits them to experience the full reality of their freely chosen condition, they will learn the true meaning of separation and will in the end choose to embrace him.
(p. 30)

MacDonald, then, believes that people who reject God in this life will be separated from him at Judgment and be sent to hell. But this isn't the end of their story; instead, he asks:

What possible reason would God have for drawing a line at death and saying, "Beyond this point I will show no mercy to those who repent and turn to Christ"? Clearly, his mercy and love do not justify such a stance; and given traditional views of justice and atonement, neither does his justice. (p. 32)

People who repent while in hell will be taken into God's presence—no matter how long it takes them to repent.

MacDonald goes on to make a case from the Bible for universalism, arguing that there are several key texts that seem to explicitly teach it; that it can be reasonably inferred from other texts; and that it is consistent with the biblical meta-narrative. He compares it to the understanding that Jesus is God the Son – the Gospel of John teaches it explicitly, while the Gospel of Mark does not. But even if the writer of Mark did not have it in mind when he wrote, 'John's Christology is broad enough to contain Mark's' (p.40). MacDonald is, of course, on risky ground drawing the comparison, with

universalism neither as explicit nor as central to Christianity, but it is a good analogy for his method.

The texts that he sees as explicitly teaching universalism include Colossians 1:15-20, which includes v.20a – 'And through him to reconcile all things to him'. The picture in Colossians is very much one of universal reconciliation; the 'all things' that are reconciled are the same 'all things' that are created through Christ in v.16. MacDonald argues against interpretations that would reduce the scope of the reconciliation to 'all kinds of things' (Jews and Gentiles) or to say it is a matter of intent rather than reality.

Bravely, MacDonald goes on to make a universalist reading of the Book of Revelation. Throughout Revelation there is a distinction between the 'saints' and the 'nations'. The 'nations' are in rebellion against God and, he argues, are cast into the lake of fire in chapter 15. But then in the New Jerusalem of chapter 20, the gates are wide open and the nations are inside the city. MacDonald argues that outside the city is the lake of fire; the gates aren't open for people to walk out of the city, but for the repentant nations to enter the city.

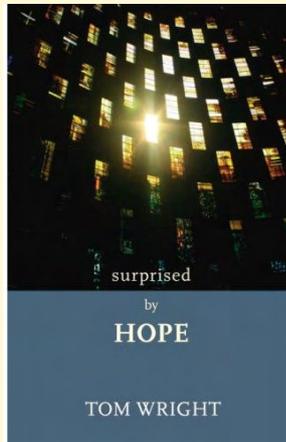
The final plank in MacDonald's biblical argument is to deal with the texts that talk about hell. Unlike some universalists, he does believe in hell; the challenge to his perspective from these texts is in the fact that they don't seem to suggest that hell will be of a limited duration, or that there will be any way out. Jesus' parable of Lazarus and Dives is a crucial example; in it, Abraham tells the rich man in Hades that 'a great chasm has been fixed' so that no-one can cross from there to be with Abraham. It is a strange parable, an adaptation of a Near Eastern folk tale, and it is not only universalists who claim Jesus was not attempting to teach about the afterlife, but to criticise the Pharisees. After dealing with other texts, MacDonald concludes that New Testament writers took prevailing cultural ideas and images of hell and connected them with a new Christian framework that ought to reshape their meaning. The borrowed cultural images are not in themselves the revealed truth about hell.

I can't make up my mind about *The Evangelical Universalist*. I agree that there are a number of passages in the Bible which suggest that ultimately God's love will save us all. Like MacDonald, I have a big problem with the idea of an eternal hell and I don't think it seems compatible with a complete and final victory of God over sin and evil. Yet despite this, I can't shake off the fear that universalism is 'wishful thinking'. I find it hard to step over the line to MacDonald's side when there are so many theologians I respect who argue against universalism. I need to spend a little longer in no-man's land.

You can buy *The Evangelical Universalist* from www.thebookdepository.co.uk for about A\$20, including postage, to Australia or NZ.

Further Reading On

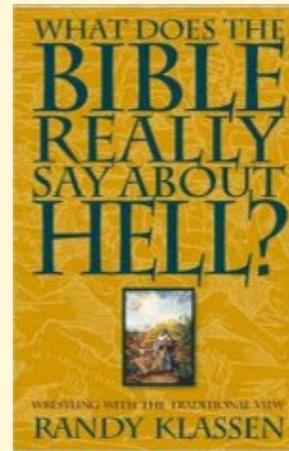
Heaven, Hell & New Creation



Surprised By Hope

Tom Wright (SPCK, 2008)

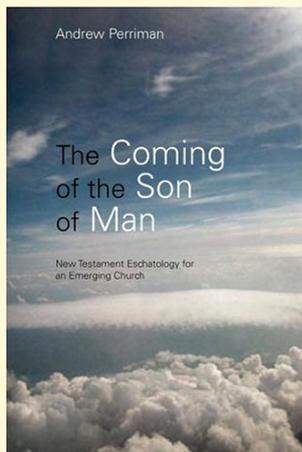
A thorough and exciting challenge to escapist eschatology, offering the hope of a renewed creation in strong continuity with what we are doing here and now. Wright sets out our task of 'building for the kingdom' here and now.



What Does the Bible Really Say About Hell?

Randy Klassen (Telford, 2001)

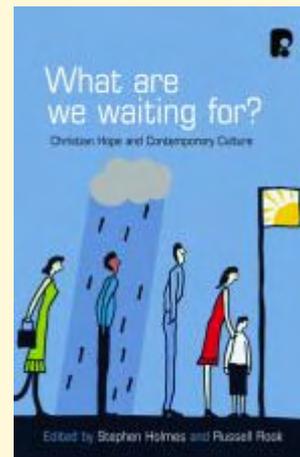
A Mennonite pastor challenges traditional interpretations of the Bible's passages about hell. Easy reading.



The Coming of the Son of Man

Andrew Perriman (Paternoster, 2005)

Subtitled 'New Testament Eschatology for an Emerging Church', this book offers a similar perspective to Tom Wright, interpreting much eschatological language in the light of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.



What Are We Waiting For?

Stephen Holmes & Russell Rook, ed. (Paternoster, 2008)

A collection of essays offering a thoughtful and progressively evangelical alternative to *Left Behind* type popular eschatologies.

Why the Peace Movement Needs to Shift Focus, and Fast

By Matt Stone



Traditionally the peace movement has focused on holding states to account for their injustices through tactics that rob them of their moral authority and social support. Think Ghandi. Think Martin Luther King. This tradition is outdated. Here's why:

The rise of non-state actors

The first reason traditional pacifism is outdated is this: we are no longer dealing exclusively with states. Increasingly the actors in war include terrorist networks, insurgent movements and technologically empowered individuals. This has been variously labelled as the rise of asymmetric war, the globalization of civil war and the fourth generation of war. Many forecasters are in fact seeing this as the future of war in a globalized, technologized society.

I remember the moment I realized that peace efforts aimed at preventing pre-emptive war in Iraq were doomed to failure. It was the moment I realized that we had no positive agenda for dealing with terrorists. We only had a plan for state actors. We had no plan for countering the violence of violent non-state actors. This doctrinal vacuum made it easy for states to demonize pacifists as terrorist sympathizers.

In the years since not much has changed. If peace movement wishes to be relevant for a wired world it needs to adapt. It needs to make this demonization more difficult. It needs to develop counter-terrorist de-escalation capability. It needs to challenge violence in all its forms.

The rise of non-enlisted warriors

The second reason traditional pacifism is outdated is this, we are no longer dealing exclusively with professional soldiers. Concurrent with the rise of non-state actors has been the rise of non-enlisted warriors, of military contractors (aka mercenaries), child soldiers and territorial warlords who lack the soldier ethos. These are people who fight for

reasons other than national defence and national pride, who may be utterly uninterested in issues of moral authority, who may be immune to shaming via media exposure, who may be fighting for profit or mere survival. This again points to the need for new tactics.

The rise of non-human soldiers

Beyond the rise of non-enlisted warriors, we are also facing the rise of the machines. Military robotics is spreading like wildfire with technology transfers to police forces and even Hezbollah well underway. How can nonviolent activists appeal to the humanity of soldiers when they are no longer human? This is an even more serious challenge, but we need to catch up and fast.

Non-lethal weapons

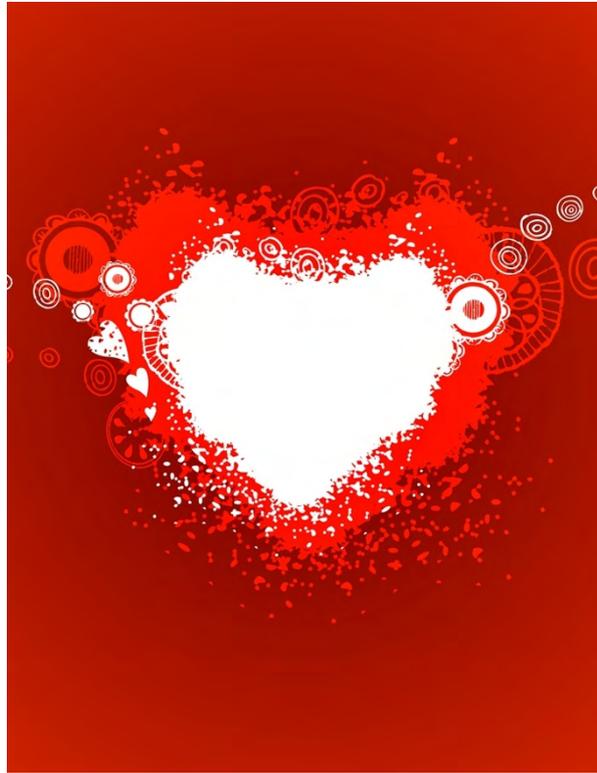
Finally we also need to come to grips with the emergence of non-lethal weapons. Ironically, their very non-lethality makes soldiers less hesitant to use them. In fact, there have already been instances of police using military grade sonic weapons on civilian protestors as a form of crowd dispersal. Conversely, protestors are already working on neutralization technologies. But I'm nervous about this. Is it wise to enter into a defacto non-lethal arms race? Have we thought where this could be taking us?

So basically we need a new pacifism. Hopefully this has provoked some reflection. Particularly amongst peace churches and pacifist Christians. But I think there are issues here for just war Christians as well. Maybe you have some answers? Maybe you have better questions?

- This article first appeared on <http://mattstone.blogspot.com>

God is Love

By *Andreana Reale*



What if God is the same thing as Love? What if Love is just another name for God? What if that is a sense with which we can read the words, “God is love”?

Now, I know that the phrase God is love is only from one bit of the Bible – 1 John 4, to be precise. And even in that same passage we get other images of God – God referred to as ‘the Father’ and as having a ‘Spirit’ and so forth. But let us for a moment think about the image of God as Love.

If God is Love, then God doesn’t sit as a separate entity from humanity and the universe. It sits in the spaces between us as individuals and us as a wider creation – it is the glue between friends, between sisters, between lovers, between brothers. God is whatever Love is, and the opposite of what Love isn’t. To borrow the inspired words of Paul, Love is patience and kindness; it is a lack of envy and a lack of pride; it is trust, hope and perseverance. Love is like the wind – all we can see of it is what it does... just like God, perhaps. “No-one has ever seen God,” says the author of 1 John, “but if we love one

another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” Where there is Love, there is God. “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him,” says the author.

Sitting alongside this notion is a clear personification of God that is consistent with other parts of the Bible – the author writes of God the Father, who shows his love for us by sending his Son into the world. God is not just synonymous with Love. Yet it occurs to me that perhaps the Father is simply one way of imagining God, or of personifying Love. I wonder whether we consider Jesus divine because he embodied Love. When we embody love, are we divine too? I write these things tentatively – they are fledging thoughts, not complex theology.

“There is no fear in love,” says the author. “But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

Member Profile: Danny Klopovic



1. What interests you most about Anabaptism?

Due to my past interest and practice of Buddhism, the first thing that attracted me to Anabaptism was the centrality of nonviolence in this tradition. The more I read texts within the tradition such as the *Martyrs Mirror*, a variety of works by Anabaptist authors, past and present, I fell in love with the “ratbag” nature of Anabaptism. I also found the movie production *The Radicals* that recounted the story of Michael and Margaretha Sattler to be particularly moving. I have found that within this tradition, there are so many colourful characters that I could only think: “if there’s a place for these people, then there is a place for me!”

2. Favourite part of the Bible?

This is a difficult one as there are many favourite parts! From time to time, I toy with the idea of doing a Jeffersonian by having an edited version of the Bible with all of my favourite material. However, if I had to choose, the book of Wisdom is my favourite biblical text as it is beautifully written and retells the story of Israel in poetic form. I am particularly fond of the paean to Wisdom in chapter 7 and my favourite verses are 1:14-15, “For He created all things, that they might have their being, and all the living creatures are beautiful and there is no destructive poison in them, for Death was not formed for the Earth – as righteousness is immortal”

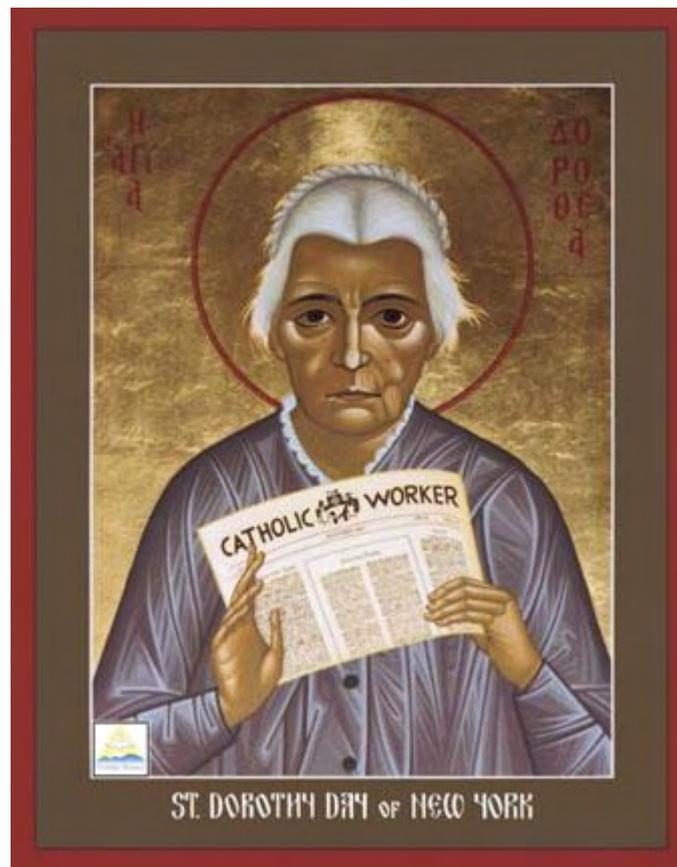
3. Least favourite part of the Bible?

The genealogies and the seemingly endless regulations in relation to the sacrifices win hands down for the title of least favourite. Whenever I read them, my eyes start glazing over.

4. Your church involvement, present and/or past?

I’ve had a fairly eclectic religious history – I was raised Catholic and attended the local Croatian church in my childhood which was also the cultural centre for Croats in Victoria for many years. In my late teenage years I became an atheist and that lasted for several years until I discovered Buddhism – though I was attracted to the non-theistic tradition of the Theravadin along with Zen. I still maintained this interest during my university years even though I attended the local Christian Union on campus. I slowly dropped my Buddhism, largely due to the fact that there was no convenient Western Buddhist group I could attend – though to this day, I still enjoy reading Buddhist texts and have retained my meditative practice I learnt all those years ago. I attended the various Christian groups on campus, which exposed me to Anglican, Catholic, Pentecostal and Evangelical groups, the (Evangelical) Christian Union being the one that I attended the most and eventually became Secretary – until my position was revoked in a defacto excommunication but that is a whole other story.

My first regular church attendance was at the student evening church at St Jude’s Anglican Church in Carlton – which was after I finished my university studies. Not long after, I also started attending the North Fitzroy Seventh-Day Adventist church. My attendance overlapped in that that I attended the SDA church on Sabbath mornings and the Anglican church on Sunday evenings. This went on for several years until St Jude’s had a new minister who instituted policies that effectively drove out the non-evangelicals out of the church – the charismatics, the feminists, the left-wing radicals, the heterodox all left and I along with them. My experiences as a result of this personal history have ingrained in me a permanently negative impression of Evangelicals.



I discovered Anabaptism in my last year of university via a free book being given away by the Christian bookstore on campus – Art Gish’s *Living in Christian Community*. Reading it was an epiphany - I can only describe it as a homecoming. This feeling of homecoming was to be later reinforced by my lucky discovery and attendance at the first Anabaptist conference held in 1995 where the AAANZ was born. It was my discovery at university that led me to the SDA church since I had read an article by a SDA theologian arguing that the SDAs were an Anabaptist church - and as it turned out, there was one just down the road from where I lived. I found out eventually that the theologian's claim was more wishful thinking than reality but by then I had become one of the adult Sabbath school teachers and made a number of friends there so I attended there for nearly a decade.

I am not attending any church at present – but I am considering several options, namely a Quaker church in Fitzroy and the Brunswick Baptist church. Both are within walking distance from where I live so I will be exploring them over the next few months. I have also been contemplating running a network group but this is a much more difficult proposition.

5. How do you spend your time – work, study, etc?

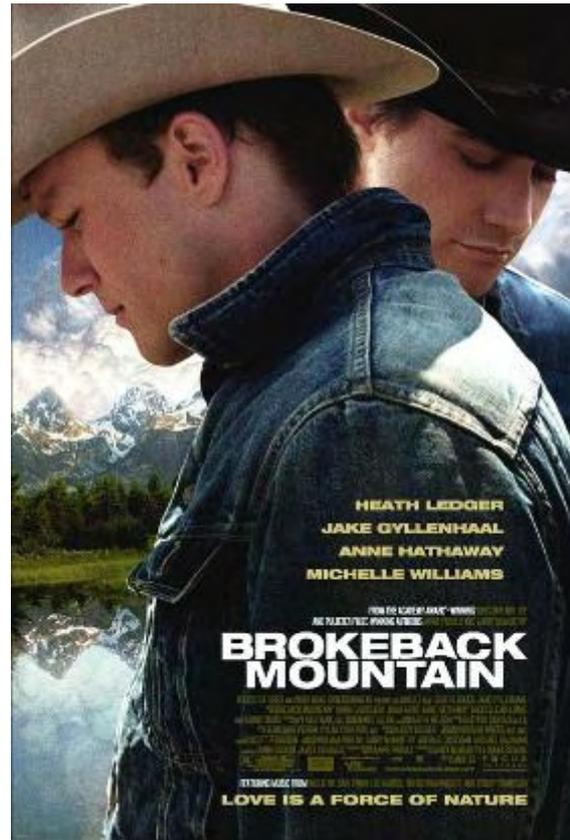
I work in the area of federal bankruptcy administra-

tion as the assistant business manager for the Melbourne office of the Insolvency & Trustee Service Australia. As of May this year, I will have worked there for twenty-one years. It has only been in the last three years however that I have become assistant business manager and I quite enjoy the work, which involves managing three teams, working on national projects and continuous improvement of procedures and practices.

When I am not working, I am enjoying the company of friends on Friday nights and the weekends. I enjoy attending free public lectures at Melbourne University, the Existentialist Society, the Humanist Society and occasionally the Theosophical Society. I also enjoy attending movies, plays and other performances. Otherwise the rest of my time is spent in reading books.

6. A book or a writer who has inspired you in your discipleship?

In my personal library, I have two bookshelves that separate out of all my other books those I have found formative for my thought and life. The authors range from Dorothy Day, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Vigen Guroian, Jakob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, Kallistos Ware, Barbara Kingsolver and so forth. Texts include the *Philokalia*, the *Rule of St*



Benedict, the Martyr's Mirror, Aquinas' Summa, the Gospel of Thomas, and so on. However, if I had to select but one out of all that has shaped me over the years, I would have to pick Dorothy Day because of her blend of anarchism, nonviolence and Christian discipleship.

7. Your favourite Anabaptist?

This is a hard one as there are so many that I am fond of – past ones being Pilgram Marpeck, Thomas Muntzer and Hans Denck and contemporary ones like Roberta Showalter Kreider, a wonderful Mennonite grandmother and author. Again, if I had to choose but one, I'd pick Hans Denck for his deep mysticism, humility and openness towards not only other Christians but also Jews, Muslims and Pagans [heathens was the word he used but I have updated here].

8. A favourite film and why?

Ang Lee's 2005 masterpiece *Brokeback Mountain* is one of my favourite movies – it is not only a story of a great love but it evokes an almost unbearable sadness. It is one thing to hide a love affair as many heterosexuals have done, but quite another for the two men to be forced by the wider society to deny the very

possibility of love. Though set in the past, the movie provides a cautionary tale as to the wider culture's homophobia but also the tragic outworking of internalised homophobia depicted in Ennis del Mar's (Heath Ledger) heartbreaking portrayal.

9. Politics?

I identify with the anarchist / libertarian approach to politics – but on a tactical basis rather than strategic as I think that anarchism works better as a critique of current social orders and practices rather than providing a full-fledged alternative. I prefer a bricolage of anarcho-syndicalist, anarcha-feminist, eco-anarchist and anarcho-pacifist thought.

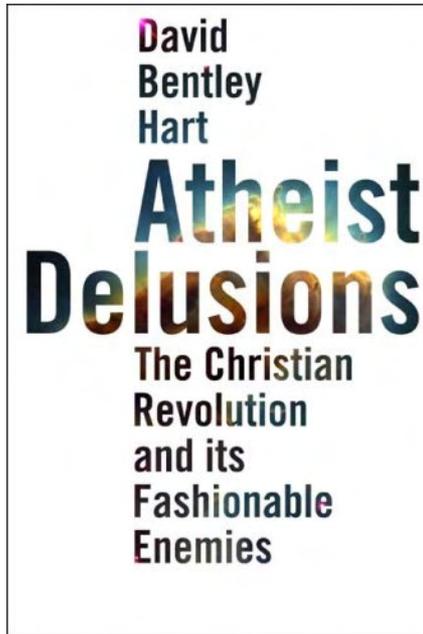
10. Pastimes?

My favourite pastime – really a passion – is books. My idea of paradise is a giant library with all the classics and great literature along with theology and philosophy. I am contemplating at some point in the future doing a degree in theology since I enjoy reading theological texts so much. I also enjoy writing though I have not done much of this for several years now – the last piece I wrote – an essay for a book – was published just over 10 years ago.

Books

Atheist Delusions: a Review Article

By Chris Marshall



Atheist Delusions: the Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies

David Bentley Hart (Yale University Press, 2009; 252 p.)
Reviewed by Chris Marshall

Richard Dawkins, who visits Wellington in March, has been described as the world's best-known atheist. He is certainly among its most pugnacious and determined. Along with fellow campaigners, such as Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, Professor Dawkins pounds the world's speaking circuits proclaiming his gospel of unbelief with an almost fundamentalist religious zeal, an irony not lost on his detractors. According to Dawkins, God is a delusion – which means, of course, that those sad people who happen to believe in God (and, if polls are to be believed, it is still the majority of us) are, by definition, deluded.

Many sophisticated rejoinders to the polemics of these so-called “new atheists” have been published. They come not just from Christian apologists but from scholars of religion, philosophers, scientists, literary critics and cultural commentators. Dawkins, it

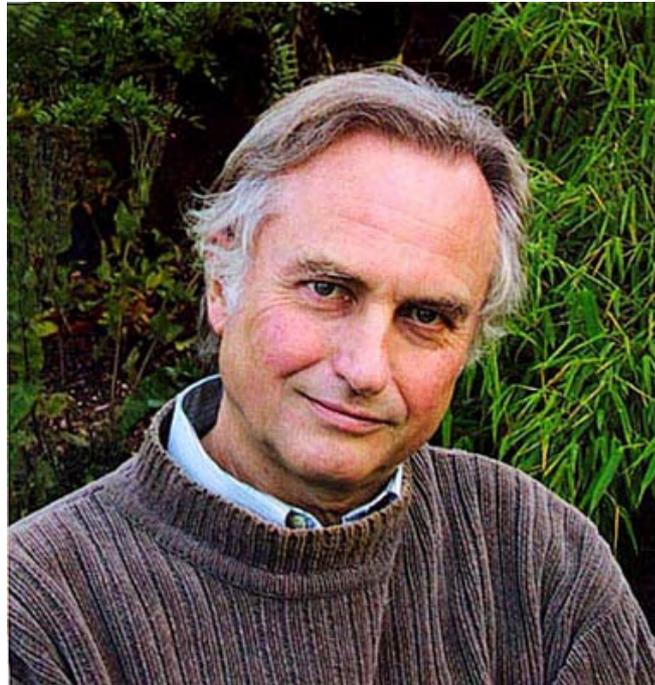
appears, is choosy about his sparring partners. Quite by chance the other night I stumbled across a YouTube clip in which Dawkins was asked from the floor of a public meeting in the UK why he had refused an invitation to debate the prominent Christian philosopher, William Lane Craig. Dawkins replied that he was happy to debate with bishops, rabbis and cardinals but he was too busy to engage with “professional debaters” whose names he did not know and who simply wanted to burnish their own reputation. Other YouTube clips indicate that Dawkins is not too busy to appear on American TV talk shows or to be interviewed on Fox television.

New atheists are fond of claiming the intellectual high ground for their case against God. Evolutionary science, they insist, all but fatally negates the existence of God. For Dawkins there is no more reason to believe in God than in the tooth fairy. Religion can best be thought of as a kind of virus – a virus of the mind – that infects young and impressionable brains and is passed on down the generations, partly because of its capacity to incite wishful thinking.

Listeners pre-disposed to be confirmed in their own unbelief can be lulled into a false sense of security by such dogmatic self-assurance on the part of these new atheists. They might easily conclude, on the basis of their simplistic and contemptuous caricatures of religion, that the ranks of believers comprise only of simpletons, charlatans and terrorists.

Just how far from the truth this is, is nowhere more evident than in the incisive new book by David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*. Hart has been described as one of America's sharpest minds, and it is not hard to see why. With immense learning and a quite dazzling literary eloquence, Hart lays waste to the citadels of new atheism. As one scholarly reviewer observes, if Dawkins and his allies had known of the existence of David Bentley Hart, they might never have dared put pen to paper!

Hart's chief complaint with the new atheists is their sheer lack of intellectual grunt. He slams their reliance on reckless and sanctimonious rhetoric, their selective and tendentious use of sources, their woeful igno-



Richard Dawkins—lightweight?

rance of intellectual history, their lack of self-critical awareness, and their embarrassing incapacity for sustained philosophical reasoning. In these respects they fall far short of the great anti-Christian antagonists of the past, like David Hume, Voltaire, Edward Gibbon and Friedrich Nietzsche. Compared to those intellectual giants, today's polemicists are mere gadflies. They are "far lazier, less insightful, less subtle, less refined, more emotional, more ethically complacent, and far more interested in facile simplifications of history than in sober and demanding investigations of what Christianity has been or is". When it comes to religion, the peddlers of today's atheism literally don't know what they're talking about. Perhaps it a symptom of the superficiality of our age, Hart rues, that "we have lost the capacity to produce profound unbelief".

Two of the most recurrent themes in new atheist literature are that belief in God is entirely baseless, without any evidential or scientific support whatsoever, and that religion, especially monotheistic religion, is a principal cause for much of the violence, oppression and injustice in the world. "Religion" – a catch-all term that is rarely defined, and never understood – is excoriated as at once myopic and malign. At the same time, the rise of secular modernity is uncritically accepted as the story of humanity's progressive deliverance from the grip of ignorance and bloodshed, the irresistible triumph of objective reason and scientific discovery over superstition, barbarism and faith.

Both these propositions are crushingly rebutted by Hart. Not that he simply rehearses familiar arguments for the existence of God, as Dawkins does, nor rallies to the defence of the institutional church. His analysis cuts much deeper than that, in two main respects.

On the one hand, Hart calls attention to the profound and far-reaching transformations that occurred in the intellectual, moral, cultural and political fabric of Western civilisation as a result of the Christian "revolution" in the early centuries of the common era. The success of the new "Galilean" faith, as it was sometimes called by its opponents, in steadily supplanting the old pagan social and religious order was itself a remarkable and unprecedented development. But as it gradually occurred, it brought about truly revolutionary changes at the deepest levels of Western consciousness, and at the highest levels of its culture.

Foremost among these changes was Christianity's profound affirmation of the innate dignity and equality of the human person, its repudiation of fatalism and fear of occult forces, its affirmation of the material world as God's good and rationally ordered creation, and its elevation of active charity or love as the supreme moral virtue and the most indispensable of religious obligations. Without the radically new vision of reality bestowed by the Christian gospel, many of the greatest accomplishments of the Western tradition – its arts and sciences, its institutions and traditions, its philosophies and moral ideals – might never have occurred.

Modern secularism take these achievements for granted, and sometimes falsely claims credit for them. But in so doing, it exhibits a convenient historical amnesia, for, in truth, they derive from the world view and moral perceptions bequeathed to Western civilisation by the Christian narrative. The best virtues of post-Enlightenment modernity are borrowed virtues, whilst secular modernity has failed to generate anything to match the sheer cultural creativity and dynamism of Christendom.



Friedrich Nietzsche—one of the 'great anti-Christian antagonists of the past'.

None of this is to deny that the institutional church frequently failed to live up to its own ideals and standards, especially following its installation as the official religion of the empire. This is not surprising, for, as Hart notes, power corrupts and human beings frequently disappoint. But it is the existence and cultural potency of the ideals and standards themselves that is the most important thing to appreciate. Moral values are not given in nature. They do not naturally evolve (contra Dawkins). They come from human tradition. They are socially constructed and historically contingent. Before counselling modern society to renounce Christianity in the name of freedom and rationality, modern atheists should have the good manners to admit that they are inheritors of a social conscience whose content and grammar would have been very different had it not been decisively shaped by Christian moral and metaphysical convictions.

As well as recounting the formative power of Christianity in Western history, Hart launches a devastating attack upon the credibility of the story that post-Enlightenment modernity tells itself about its own origins and achievements. In particular, Hart challenges the unquestioning faith modern atheists ask us to place in the secular state as the most enlightened instrument we possess to deliver peace, tolerance and human rights. Where, he asks, is the hard evidence for this belief? Surely the facts of history point in the opposite direction. The secular political tradition is so steeped in blood and suffering that any claims made for to its ethical superiority are entirely without empirical foundation.

Of course it is true that religiously-justified conflict and persecution stain the pages of early and medieval Christendom. Thousands of lives were lost over many

centuries in the name of religious truth. Yet at least the arrogance and violence of pre-modern princes and sovereigns was held in check to some degree by a universal sense of accountability to a larger spiritual and moral authority, to the law of God. The modern secular state, by contrast, recognises no authority beyond itself, and in its quest for unbridled power and control of territory, countless millions of lives have been sacrificed.

The twentieth century was both the most secular and the most violent era in all of human history, with at least 100 million people dying in wars and conflicts. Religious justifications for this mass murder were no longer commonplace simply because they are no longer necessary. The interests of the nation state alone were now sufficient to persuade, and require, men to kill one another abundantly, with a zeal unrivalled in all of religious history. "Christian society never fully purged itself of cruelty and violence", Hart concedes, "but it also never incubated evils comparable in ambition, range, systematic precision, or mercilessness to death camps, gulags, forced famines, or the extravagant brutality of modern warfare. Looking back at the twentieth century, it is difficult not to conclude that the rise of modernity has resulted in an age of at once unparalleled banality and unprecedented monstrosity, and that these are two sides of the same coin".

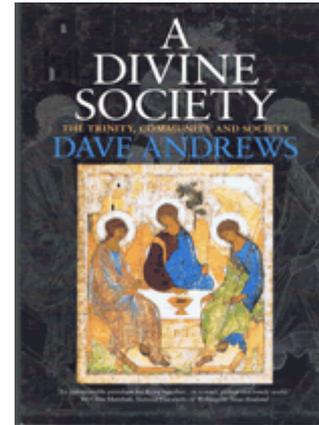
Living in the slip stream of this most dreadfully violent century in all of human experience, any rational assessment of the evidence would surely suggest that secular government is the one form of political power that has shown itself to be too violent, too capricious, and too unprincipled to be trusted.

Hart's penetrating analysis of our present cultural mo-

ment should not be confused for some reactionary call to arms in defence of “Christian” values or “Christian” civilisation against the purveyors of godless humanism. Far from it. No-one has the power to will collective belief into existence (or out of existence, for that matter) for purely utilitarian reasons. Hart is actually deeply pessimistic about the potential of Christianity to arrest the cultural and moral drift of late-modernity towards banality and brutality.

But whereas Dawkins and his fellow atheists seem to believe that our most cherished moral values can flourish independently of the “God-delusion” that once nurtured them, Hart is much less sanguine about the prospects. Like Nietzsche, whom he frequently cites, Hart thinks it is impossible for us to cast off Christian faith without corroding, and eventually destroying, Christian morality. Christianity, with its distinctive understanding of human dignity and the purpose of human existence, once permeated every aspect of Western life. As it now fades from view, everything will therefore be affected, including our understanding of what it means to be human. It is not implausible to imagine that as the religion of the God-man, who summoned human beings to divine fellowship through self-giving love, steadily recedes, the more ancient religion of the man-god who wrests divinity from materiality through violent exertion of the will may reappear in new form.

How then should faithful Christians respond “after the age of Christendom”? Certainly we should not despair, for we know our faith to be a cosmic truth, not simply a cultural logic, that can never be defeated. Perhaps we can discern signs of hope in the rapid growth of Christianity in Asia, Africa and Latin America, though Hart thinks it is too soon to speak of a new Christendom. Greater hope is to be found by looking back at the example of the desert fathers and the early monastics at the dawn of Christendom. At the very time when Christianity was assuming political and social power, a new revolutionary movement emerged in the church centred on the renunciation of power, wealth and influence and the commitment to “live for the love of God and one’s neighbour, to banish envy, hate, and resentment from the soul, and to seek the beauty of Christ in others”. This, Hart suggests, could well be the appropriate model for Christianity in the late modern West: a model in which men and women accept willing exile from the world of prestige and power and devote themselves “to the science of charity”, to the love of God and the love of neighbour.



The Divine Society: Trinity, Community and Society

Dave Andrews (Frank Communications, 2008; 174pp.)

Available from www.lastfirst.net for A\$39.99.

Reviewed by Nathan Hobby

AAANZ member Dave Andrews is based in Brisbane with his community, the Waiter’s Union. In this book, he uses a 14th century icon by Andrei Rublev of the three members of the Trinity eating together to structure a series of reflections on the Trinity and community. The book offers a theology of the Trinity and a Trinitarian understanding of the church as a transforming community. It is mostly theoretical, but we read with the knowledge that it’s theory written by a true practitioner, undergirding and unpacking the reality of his practice.

The book has three parts. In the first, Dave examines ‘The Trinity as an icon of community’. He looks at some basic characteristics of the trinity, including gender equity – not patriarchy! – and genuine equality.

Part two looks at the Trinity as ‘a divine model for human community’. Each of the members of the trinity offers special insights for those of us seeking to live in genuine community; the Father is the Creator; the Son is the Liberator and the Spirit is the Sustainer.

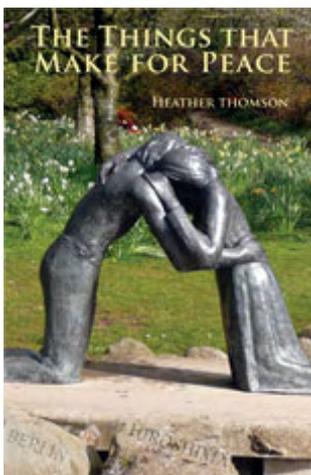
The third part is ‘an imaginative method for community development’. Dave writes how he once saw the church as a light on a hill, but now thinks of the yeast in the dough as the controlling image for his view of the church. If the light on a hill emphasises the church’s separation from the world, the yeast image calls for the church to be mixed into the world. (Perhaps the Anabaptist tradition has tended to emphasise the light on the hill aspect, the set-apart church as a holy people in a sinful world. It is telling

that both images come from the mouth of Jesus – I wonder if we have to hold both images in tension, or whether we should choose one image and run with it?) I was particularly challenged in this third part by Dave’s discussion of how being community means letting go of our notions of success – even our received notions of being ‘great’ for God.

The book finishes with a very practical caution entitled ‘Those who love community destroy community; only those who love people create community.’

Throughout the book, Dave draws on writers from diverse traditions, including radical Baptist poet-farmer Wendell Berry, local evangelical Mark Strom, Catholic spiritual writer Henri Nouwen and popular psychologist/ spiritual writer M.Scott Peck. He does an excellent job of integrating these writers with insights from everyday life, popular culture and his own experience.

The book comes highly recommended by Chris Marshall and the emerging church’s Brian McLaren. Chris sums the book up well, writing, ‘Over and over again, he shows how the Trinity, far from being some mathematical abstraction, is actually an indispensable paradigm for living together in a cruel, violent and lonely world.’



The Things That Make For Peace

Heather Thomson (Barton Books, 2009)

RRP: A\$25

Reviewed by Doug Hynd

Anabaptist themes are surfacing widely in apparently mainstream religious publishing. The latest example that has come to my attention is by Heather Thomson a lecturer at St Mark’s Theological Institute who has taken up the issues of peacemaking and restorative justice from a theological perspective in *The Things That Make For Peace*.

The book draws on the experiences of participants in reconciliation processes in South Africa and Northern Ireland. The author examines the different and difficult paths of justice and forgiveness in these lands. In both cases the stories have become part of our shared understanding across the globe of the possibilities and controversy surrounding forgiveness and reconciliations. Heather explores the broader contribution that these stories can provide in our attempt to understand the possibilities and limits of conflict resolution.

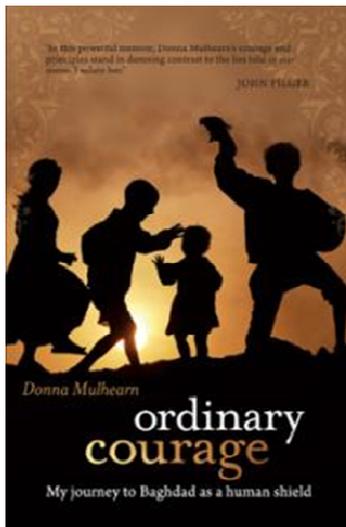
The discussion blends insights from psychologists, moral philosophers, lawyers, theologians and victims to show how peace can proceed from violent bloodshed and in particular how this can be read in theological terms.

Heather does not restrict her discussion to the well trodden paths of a narrowly academic theology of atonement or a standard public policy discussion of restorative justice. *The Things that Make for Peace* closes with an account which highlights spiritual paths to peace and strategies for raising children equipped to build a more peaceful world. Heather’s interest in exposing us to the voices of children is made evident in the drawings by the children from South Africa that beautifully frame the discussion.

In her opening theological discussion on the theme of justice Heather draws substantially on the work of a theologian known to readers of this publication, Chris Marshall. What is particularly interesting and fresh in her engagement with recent theological discussion of the issue of forgiveness is way she takes up consideration of the atonement (reconciliation) as a form of transitional justice.

In summary, her argument is that

The atonement was characterised by mercy and forgiveness overriding the usual demands of justice to allow the conditions for reconciliation to be created. It was a work of grace that allowed for a peaceful transition from old rules (‘living under sin and death, living over against others as rivals, being inextricably caught up in an addition to being less than ourselves’) into a new rule, the reign of God. The work of reconciliation then continues into a life-long project and calling, that of healing, putting off the old self and putting on the new, being transformed as individuals



Ordinary Courage

Donna Mulhearn (Pier 9, 2010)
Reviewed by Mark S. Hurst

Donna Mulhearn is a “pilgrim and storyteller, challenging militarism, living simply, writing pilgrim notes and presenting talks around Australia about the war in Iraq, nonviolence, how to make a difference and Christian meditation.” (p. 254) At the age of thirty-four, she had become disillusioned by her career as a journalist and political adviser in New South Wales and set off on a journey of self-discovery. One day she heard something radical, a call to action that would change her course, and her life, forever. A man on the radio was appealing for human shields in Iraq, volunteers to deter the ‘Coalition of the Willing’ from attacking Baghdad. Donna was already against the war - she was a firm believer in the power of non-violent action. She knew immediately what she had to do.

Despite protests from concerned family and friends, Donna soon found herself travelling from Sydney to Baghdad. There she joined hundreds of shields from all over the world that formed small teams to protect major sites, power stations, water treatment plants, communication centres, that were crucial to the life of innocent people. Even when Saddam's statue toppled and the Coalition claimed victory, her challenges did not end.

On her return to Sydney in 2003, she committed herself to telling the story of the Iraqi people she met. *Ordinary Courage* is the result. We attended the book launch sponsored by Sydney University's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, in conjunction with the publishers and the Edmund Rice Network, a Catholic social justice organisation. We heard Donna passionately tell stories from her time in Iraq and a little about her recent trip to Gaza.

Ordinary Courage is very readable. Donna's past as a journalist is evident in her writing. Chapter five, “Living City”, is an excellent description of Baghdad before the war. However, Donna does not write as a detached observer; she shares her thoughts, feelings, and conflicts openly. In chapter six we learn a bit about Donna – survivor of a failed marriage, a former fundamentalist Christian, on a journey to a new spirituality through Christian meditation.

Donna describes well the cost of war for all of those involved. In chapter six she writes about depleted uranium. Used by the U.S. military in armour-piercing shells they make a near perfect weapon. “The problem is the burning cloud of vapour that's left hovering over the wreckage, forming dust particles that can be blown long distances and inhaled by both soldiers and civilians. These dust particles are chemically poisonous and radioactive. They are absorbed into the earth and can remain in the air for five hundred years or more, creating a human and environmental catastrophe.” (pp.62-63)

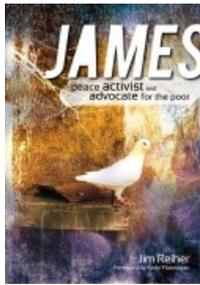
The book is dedicated to Arian, a twelve-year-old Iraqi girl Donna met in a hospital. Arian died from leukaemia as many other Iraqi children have done. The scene in Arian's hospital room is powerfully described and is one that has left a lasting mark on Donna.

The book gives a good description of a nonviolent movement and the people involved. It describes the necessary elements of a successful effort – organisational skills, consensus decision-making, sense of humour, and a healthy dose of scepticism. However, the inevitable power struggles are there too. Donna is open about how passionate and gifted people get caught up in the dumbest tiffs over the silliest things and does not hide this side of humanity in her storytelling.

Cross-cultural conflict is almost inevitable too in a Middle Eastern country suddenly invaded by passionate well-meaning western activists. Our culture travels with us. Donna gives some good examples of the misunderstandings this can cause.

Donna describes well the fear and uncertainty of living in a nation under “shock and awe” bombing. It is something that most of us will never experience. Reading about it is bad enough. Donna is honest about the toll it took on her. In one moment of despair she wrote, “Violence is the act of forgetting who we are: human beings who are each other's brothers and sisters. If only we could do more to remember.” (p. 173)

Donna knows the power of story. She captures well the human cost of war in the personal stories she tells. These stories reach us in a way statistics do not. Donna has done us all a favour in telling us these stories. What will we do with them?



James: Peace Activist and Advocate for the Poor

Jim Reiher (UNOH, 2009)

Available from www.unoh.org

Reviewed by Mark S. Hurst

The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online says:

The Epistle of James is generally attributed to James, the brother of Jesus, in Jerusalem. Luther called it an ‘epistle of straw’, because it does not ‘promote Jesus’. Menno criticized Luther severely for this statement. But even though the name of Jesus is mentioned only twice, His teachings meet us throughout, as they are given in the Gospels, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. His earnest admonition to endure suffering and trial in patience, his opposition to an unfruitful theology, his warning against sins of the tongue, against the secularization of the church, against the injurious influence of wealth and opulent living, the command against swearing, and his insistence upon a life of prayer make of the Epistle of James a classic exponent of a practical Christianity which permeates everyday life. No wonder that it has always been highly regarded in Anabaptist circles.

Sixteenth-century Anabaptists such as Menno Simons did not share Luther's uneasiness about the Epistle of James; instead, they welcomed its emphasis upon good works and quoted the book often in their writings. The Epistle has always been one of my favourite books in the New Testament so I was pleased when UNOH sent me a copy of Jim Reiher's book to review.

On the UNOH website it says,

This new and fresh commentary on the epistle of James is an exciting contribution to discussion about that New Testament letter. Jim Reiher has given us a thought-provoking and readable book on James. It will change how you see the book! Reiher shows us that James was a social activist before the term was invented. He was a peace-maker. He cared for the poor.

Not being structured like a normal biblical commentary is a strength and a weakness for this volume. On the positive side, it allows for features not often found in a commentary. Again, the UNOH website says,

Two ‘extra’ features to this book are: discussion questions at the end of each chapter and digressions that stand out with a light shading behind them in the chapters they belong to. The questions are excellent for study groups, and the digressions are deeply thought-provoking. Whether Reiher is talking about: the myths surrounding refugees; different kinds of pacifists; Jesus' cleansing of the Temple; the just war theory; economic sins of the last few decades; or the wisdom of Solomon and the two prostitutes – whenever the digressions come up, they are provocative, insightful and stretching to read.

The weakness in this layout of the book is the confusion between what is ‘commentary’ and what is ‘extra’. Some may agree that this brings freshness to the book but I found it confusing at times. A clearer delineation in the book of exegesis of the text and its application to today would have improved the book for me.

The author quotes John Howard Yoder, describes Jesus as a pacifist and says Christians should be as well. All things I agree with. Reiher did his homework on the authorship of James and that comes through. He also provides a helpful section at the end on key words in the book – all very helpful in understanding the Epistle of James.

I highly recommend the book, particularly for those readers who are not very familiar with James. It is a good introduction.

That said, I think it could be better. I assume the audience for this book is Evangelical Christians who need convincing that peace and justice are key elements of the good news Jesus announced. Certain non-biblical terms used frequently in the book may weaken its appeal to this audience and weaken the argument of the book. Specifically I am thinking of terms like ‘pacifist’ and ‘non-violence’.

The word ‘pacifist’ is so misunderstood and divisive that it may have reached its used-by-date. A preferable alternative is the biblical term ‘peacemaker’. It is a positive term and calls us to more than just loving peace (who doesn't love peace?) to active peacemaking. James describes these elements of peacemaking and Reiher does a good job of pointing that out.

The word ‘non-violence’ is a negative term. It describes what one is against – violence. Peacemakers need a positive way to talk about what it is we are for. Here I am addressing all of us concerned about peace and justice. Could Shalom be the word we use to capture the biblical dream of wholeness, well being, welfare and peace?

Statements in the book like “Taking into account his [James's] constant comments on non-violence and pacifism...” (p.82) get pedants like me going – and I agree with the overall message of the book. The Epistle of James does not use these terms and never to my knowledge even mentions the word “violence.” The argument of the book would be stronger if the author stuck with the biblical language James used which in itself is sufficient to show the Epistle's concern for peace and justice.

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Subscription to *On The Road* is free; email the editor, nathanhobby@gmail.com to be added to the list. You will receive the quarterly *On The Road* by email as a pdf attachment and occasional requests for articles or feedback.

Contribute

We welcome submissions. To contribute, please send your piece to the editor, Nathan Hobby, nathanhobby@gmail.com. Submissions should be in Microsoft Word (any version) or Rich Text Format. Photos or illustrations are helpful.

In our next issue, we're exploring Anabaptist responses to the Old Testament.

Suggestions for articles:

- How do you use the Psalms in worship and prayer?
- What do the Ancient Israelites have to teach us today?
- How do you understand the Canaanite genocide and other instances of violence commanded by God?
- Review a book you've read about the Old Testament.

The deadline is 7 June 2010. Non-themed submissions are always welcome too.

Join

If you identify with the Anabaptist impulse and want to join the AAANZ, visit www.anabaptist.asn.au.

Membership is open to individuals and groups who desire to make Jesus, community and reconciliation the centre of their faith, life and work.

Membership enables you to be connected to others in the network and join tele-chats with guest speakers from your own phone.

There is no membership fee, but contributions to support the association and particularly the work of our staffworkers, Mark and Mary Hurst, are encouraged.

Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand

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