On The Road

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Editor's Note:

As many of you already know, Mary and I are studying in North America during 2007. Mary is finishing a Master's in Christian Formation at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana. In May, we move to the Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia where I will be taking three courses and Mary two. We will be travelling with mission board commitments during June, July and August. This will involve conferences, visiting and speaking in churches, and some time with family. September will find us back in Elkhart, Indiana for another term at AMBS and then after Christmas we will return to Australia.

During this year I committed myself to keep the AAANZ Mailings going and to get out the quarterly journal ***ON THE ROAD***. The first I do by myself. The second is a joint effort with Mary. Her studies have her total commitment at the present so she is not able to the able editorial work she normally does on putting the journal together. So ***ON THE ROAD 33*** is coming to you with articles, reviews, etc. but no photos and professional looking layout. We'll see how we are going when June rolls around. Hopefully we will be able to return to our normal format.

Shalom, Mark S. Hurst

View From Ephesians Four

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

***"I command you to show respect for older people and to obey me with fear and trembling."* Leviticus 19:32 (CEV)**
***"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."* I Timothy 5:17 (NRSV)**

In the city where we are currently living, there is a monument in honour of police and fire officers. The inscription on the monument says: "Remembering those who have gone before us. Honouring those who serve us. Inspiring those who will." This is good advice for the church too.

In January we attended a week of meetings in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where North American Anabaptist mission and development agency leaders got together to give reports, network and be inspired by a resource person. We did a presentation on AAANZ and participated in the Asia Committee meetings. The highlight of the whole event for us came on the Thursday evening when the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists held a banquet. The meal and presentation afterwards was in recognition of two couples who have given over sixty years of service to the church.

James Krabill from the Mennonite Mission Network (U.S.) said "It is good to honour our elders before they are our ancestors." Each of the couples had a chance to tell some of their stories. It was impressive. These humble servants of God and the church honoured us with their wisdom even as we tried to honour them with a dinner and a certificate.

Following these Pittsburgh meetings, some of the mission agency staff members went on to Uruguay for a gathering of Latin American Anabaptists called the Southern Cone Anabaptist-Mennonite Congress. Organizers this year decided to invite John Driver, teacher, author, and long-time missionary to speak on the role of women in the church. On Saturday night, John Driver's 60 years of ministry, service and mission in Latin America was celebrated, recognizing his contribution to the articulation of a Latin American Anabaptist theology. A book containing contributions from theologians from churches in Latin America and Spain, who have been his disciples, was presented to him.

Other long-serving Christian leaders are honoured with Festschrifts, books signifying their years of contribution to scholarship and other areas of church service. ***Prophecy and Passion*** was one such book written in honour of Athol Gill (reviewed in OTR #19). Biographies and autobiographies are another way to keep in mind what those older servants among us have done.

19-22 January 2007, AAANZ held its bi-annual conference in Western Australia. The theme was "Living Anabaptism: Seeking a Community of Promise." Among the participants was Dr Noel Vose, President of the Baptist World Alliance from 1985 to 1990. We honour him for his years of work teaching and leading within the Baptist Church worldwide and in Australia, and working at dialogue and co-operation with groups outside of the Baptist Church – like the Mennonites. Dr. Vose has been an inspiration to many in the AAANZ network and we have been personally blessed by his generous hospitality on several of our visits to Perth.

In this issue of ***ON THE ROAD*** we will have several reflections from the Perth conference, the second half of an article from Chris Marshall, and the usual mix of book reviews and publisher announcements. More from the Perth conference will appear in our June issue. Enjoy and please respond with any comments or thoughts on what you read here. We appreciate feedback in the form of letters to the editors.

- **Mark and Mary Hurst**

AAANZ President's Report
"A Focus Beyond Ourselves"

In the short time since becoming President of the Anabaptist Association I have talked widely to hear what is happening amongst radical Christian people around Australia and New Zealand. Through listening to the many stories, my personal horizons have expanded. From each conversation, I have been given more names and in turn spoken with others. The stories intertwine and reveal a web of people on the road of discipleship and community, many working for restorative justice and peace. Though they have come from different directions they share a similar destination - to be in engagement. I sense a groundswell, dare I

say movement in the making, made up of individuals, groups and churches who are seeking fresh ways of living the gospel in touch with the world. I think and wonder what can an Anabaptist perspective bring to such a movement?

Some years ago I first came into the circle of the Anabaptist network with a certain kind of quizzical scepticism. Privately, I questioned how an apparently short lived movement almost 500 years old could be relevant to a contemporary world setting. The perilous exclusivity and introspective character of what I imagined the breakaway Anabaptist tradition represented bothered me. Only after taking time to dig deeper did I discover and appreciate the early Anabaptists had a passion and conviction that could provide inspiration for a modern movement. They walked, albeit stumbled, in what they saw as the imprints of Jesus' footsteps. They banded together to form counter cultural communities in the midst of on-going opposition from the powerful establishment. The accusation levelled sincerely by some postmodern theologians that Anabaptists were retreatists does not acknowledge that concerted oppression provokes defensive responses. Yet the Anabaptists exhibited a spirit of freedom that prevailed. The loosely connected communities perhaps more than any other movement during the Reformation transformed the character of the church to provide an enduring legacy.

To be effective in God's work of transformation requires a constant reappraisal not only of our mission but our lifestyles and us, ourselves. I have been reminded of this recently in my own journey. My focus for the last decade or so has been contained almost entirely within my own local area. I have felt the combined demands of a large family, a professional architectural practice to maintain, participation in my local church and involvement with local government and community action groups. Whilst personally satisfying, the local as best idiom has at times also bred complacency. What prompted a change in my perspective was a cooperative effort amongst the local churches to develop a partnership with another community overseas. The objective was for 1000 families in my small part of Sydney to link up with and support 1000 families in a city in Indonesia by providing small loans for independent micro-enterprise initiatives. This was the catalyst I needed to look beyond what had become familiar territory. The campaign brought churches of different traditions together, was widely reported in the local newspaper and was endorsed by the local council and mayor and caught the imagination of the broader community.

The strength of thinking globally and acting locally comes when different groups can join together to partner beyond the familiar circle of family, friends and churches. To partner means to relate in ways that can build relationships on a person to person, group to group, city to city basis across borders.

The Anabaptist Association in my mind is about fostering networks where individuals and groups can partner together. Whenever our focus is beyond ourselves and reaches out to include others we grow in ourselves. In my recent conversations I sense the opportunity across Australia and New Zealand for people committed to a radical kind of discipleship to connect in a way that enables support and encouragement. The vast continent and island geography of these two lands suffers from a tyranny of distance and isolation. The ability to relate can happen in ways other

than face to face. The cost of telecommunication has tumbled in the last few years and made networking affordable. The objectives I see for the network are simple and yet broad reaching. They are to talk, to explain, to grow and to partner. Through the sharing of our individual stories we can grow together, learn to focus beyond ourselves and listen to what God is doing with our collective story.

- **Doug Sewell, AAANZ President**

"Living Anabaptism: Seeking a Community of Promise" AAANZ 2007 Conference Reflections

*The first reflection is from **Jon Rudy**, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Asia Peace Resource worker based in Davao City, Philippines. Jon was able to attend the past two AAANZ conferences; this time with his son David. This is an edited version of a report he wrote for MCC. Jon presented a workshop and was part of a panel discussion on the conference theme.*

The AAANZ has a gathering every two years and this conference drew around fifty people from both sides of the country and New Zealand. The Perth Anabaptist Fellowship, a small house church that is gathering weekly to live out their understanding of church in this post-Christian country, organised this gathering. Along with a few members from New Zealand, Melbourne and the eastern Australian folks was another Perth-centred group called the Peace Tree Community, a group of young people living in intentional community and attracted to the radical elements of Anabaptism.

The theme of the conference was "Living Anabaptism." There were five input sessions based on J. H. Yoder's book ***Body Politics; Five Practice of the Christian Community***. These five are group discernment and church discipline, the Lord's Supper as a shared meal, baptism as entry into a new people, everyone has a gift for the church, and the open meeting.

The diversity of people attracted to Anabaptist ideas is truly amazing. From young urban activists to mainline theologians, all expressed a view that revisiting the Anabaptist Vision is a way to make the Gospel relevant in the face of church decline in Australian/New Zealand. I was able to make rich connections and enjoy many valuable conversations during the conference. One workshop David attended was by a Christian Pacemaker Team reservist [Christina Gibb from New Zealand]. He wrote:

"Christina was very enthusiastic about her work in Palestine [with the CPT]; she took time to describe every detail and she never seemed to want to quit talking about it. She was very sincere in bringing out the truth in the situation there. I think that having those sorts of teams in that area is a good idea. Some of the things they did were very effective (according to her talk), and the sort of communal work they do would create a family atmosphere that would help them work together better. I was tremendously moved by that session, and now I look at the situation there with a new perspective."

One of the greatest joys for me about the AAANZ conference was seeing the diversity of who was there: Charismatic, Church of Christ, Baptists, Bruderhof, Anglican, and Quaker. There were people from the UK, New Zealand, from the Philippians and all round Australia. There were people from big churches, emerging churches, house churches and intentional communities. There were kids and the elderly, young adults and families, activists and intellectuals, women and men. To witness the encouragement the conference was to those who have experienced the gifts of the Peace Church tradition for decades, and to also see the joy for those who experienced a "homecoming" to a tradition that doesn't separate God's transformation of us personally and the transformation of the world was wonderful.

Personal highlights for me were the new friends, whom we got to share with, pray with, made meals with and worship with. So many wonderful moments; from Megan Sheard's leading us in dancing during worship, Christina Gibb sharing Christian Peacemaker Team's witness to peace and solidarity with the suffering in Hebron, the quality of the biblical teaching from people like Ian Packer (who had us all in stiches), Ian Barns (who inspired us), Nathan Hobby (who helped us get practical) and others and the fantastic small group time and the connections that were made and strengthened.

If this is the future of Anabaptist influence in Australia, the network looks like it has been blessed to be a blessing to the church at large and wider society. In this small but significant gathering there were signs, and for those who looked close enough, humble everyday wonders, that spoke of a world transformed through Jesus.

- Jon Rudy

Walking in the Resurrection: An Anabaptist "Perfection" that Speaks of a World Transformed

*The second reflection is from **Jarrod McKenna** a Christian activist who runs peacemaking courses in Western Australian high schools. He is one of the founders of Peace Tree, an intentional community influenced by Anabaptist ideas. At the conference, Jarrod presented an overview of living Anabaptism - what it means to be an Anabaptist Christian today, and how we can hope to live the Anabaptist vision as church.*

Menno Simons wrote in 1539 that "No one can be a profitable member in this pure body of Christ who is not believing, regenerate, converted, changed, and renewed; who is not kind, generous, merciful, pitting, chaste, sober, humble, patient, long-suffering, just, constant, heavenly and spirituality minded with Christ."

In hearing these words there are a number of different reactions people may have. Some of us meet these words with joy and deep gratitude. But it is equally true that many of us can hear these words of the great 16th century Radical Reformer and instead of joy, feel guilt, burden and even debilitating shame. In our exodus from Christendom, (more than that, our call in Christ to join the "new exodus" from all domination), we must confront the principalities and powers that we have internalised that would turn the Anabaptist tradition into a death-dealing

legalism instead of the life-giving witness to the world transformed through Jesus.

In my work with training activists, I often refer to a cartoon from Michael Leunig of a street protest. The cartoon shows a protest with many people with different signs and banners, “Save the Whales”, “Stop the War”, “We want Peace”. But right down at the end of the line is a man standing at the back with a sign that reads “I hate my dad”. If you are anything like me, the things that lie behind our “righteousness” are often not the righteousness revealed in Jesus but deep wounds that we act out of without knowing it. If our communities are going to do justice to the Anabaptist tradition we must face those things in us and in our churches that need healing. We will need to deal with those logs in our eyes we are blind to that we only get glimpses of as splinters in everyone else; those things where there is no response but weeping; and those things when held that can give us ears to hear God say to us, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor.12:9)

The Anabaptist tradition has too much to offer our post-modern context to let “those things” control us and turn Anabaptism into a smug place to stand as we look down on other traditions and pray “God I thank you that I’m not like those other Christians. I care about justice, the poor and peace.” The Anabaptist communal nonviolent witness to Jesus is too important to our world on the brink of an ecological crisis for us to not deal with “those things.” I offer the following in the hope that that it might be helpful to facilitate the hearing of not just Menno Simons’ words, but the words of our Lord, as a gracious invitation to participate in the reign of God.

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” - Matthew 5:48

Sitting with this text, what questions arise for you? Here are some that I have heard after teaching and workshopping this verse with many people:

- When Jesus tells us to “be perfect” are we commanded to be something we can’t?
- Is this some cruel trick from a mean god that sets us up to fail?
- Did Jesus have it all wrong about the God he called Abba and in fact when we ask for bread, God does give us a stone?
- Is this just a punitive god having a laugh at the fact we are not created to be perfect yet we are commanded be so?
- Does this god just have dependency issues and this is his way of keeping himself in the picture by making us feel guilty that we weren’t created angels so we turn to him?
- Are we told to be perfect just to drive home the fact that we suck but God has “magic grace salve” that can make us feel better about being created to suck?
- Would it have been just as useful if we were commanded “Be purple as your heavenly Father is purple” because both are impossible?

The Logs in our Eye: The Impractical Paradigm

This kind of reading of Christ’s teaching, although exaggerated here, is more common in our churches than we might think. I see “The Impractical Paradigm” falling into two camps. Both treat Jesus’ commands

as ideals. I find it interesting reflecting on my journey and the different churches I've been a part of and which camp they are flavoured with:

1. The "must do" camp. This group read Christ's teachings as legalistic "must do's" or "have to's" to earn God's love and show we are "real Christians". This group is not restricted to quietist sects but can also be found in social-justice-Christian circles.

2. The "can't do" camp. The "can't do" camp reads Christ's teachings as insufferable ideals that make us realise we need grace because there is no way we can do what God asks. This group is not restricted to evangelicals but liberals as well (who sometimes think Jesus mistakenly thought it was the end of the world and that's why he said to live such unrealistic things that we can now disregard.)

Both of these readings produce fruit that is out of keeping with the good news of the reign of God. Both of these readings can lead to joyless, death-dealing burdens that make discipleship oppressive or irrelevant and both are impotent.

Leads to a distorted punitive image of God that looks nothing like our Lord Jesus

They also can lead to self-focused Christians. The focus on both these readings is either my perfection or my depravity. It's no wonder our churches are struggling with rampant consumerism. We've had Jesus sold to us as a product for, what Dallas Willard would call, "sin management." We've been told the gospel is all about me (!) instead of the gospel being about God's gracious deliverance in Christ by the in-breaking of the Kingdom.

Both readings are individual and not communal in focus. Both often see salvation as something separate from a people (and creation) and don't read the Sermon on the Mount primarily as the practices of a people supporting one another in the alternative to their former cycles and patterns of domination.

Both readings are often divorced from a biblical eschatology that is concerned for God's end or "goal" for all of creation

An alternative reading: The Grace Participation Paradigm

For those that have heard me preach or have experienced an EPYC workshop you will know that not a sermon goes by without me saying, "A text without a context is a sure sign you're being conned." One of the first empowering things we can do is ask about the context of the passage, what's the agenda of the writer of the gospel (because it is often not the agenda of the preacher). In the context in that part of Matthew 5 is Jesus' teaching on enemy-love. Jesus is inviting us to proactively participate in God's transformational love.

Jesus is saying God's love is all inclusive not like those who only love their friends or family. Jesus is saying God's love is unfailing in its action upon all our lives regardless of who we are or what we've done. Just as the sun is unfailing and indiscriminate in its rising on the evil and the good or the rain unfailing and indiscriminate in its falling on the just and unjust. So too is God's gracious love acting upon us all. God's love is so radically and actively inclusive and all embracing even while we were enemies of God, God has taken the gracious action of sending his Son that we can be reconciled. And we are empowered by the Spirit to participate

in God's "enemy love" and therefore participate in the "Kingdom"; that is God's revolution, which is non-violently transforming not just us personally, but all of creation.

In relating to our enemies in the way God has related to us we faithfully witness to God's chosen One and chosen Way, Jesus the nonviolent Messiah. If taken seriously, this will mean not trusting in our enemy's goodness but in the power of resurrection and God's love that conquers all. As Lee Camp would say:

"…this is not some naïve utopian dream that if we be nice to them they'll be nice to us. That might work in Barney's World (the purple dinosaur known for hugging kids and singing songs) but if we love with the very costly love seen in Christ we can expect to be treated by what has yet to be redeemed like he was."

Not only has Jesus saved us from the vicious cycles of what has not been transformed, this grace empowers us to take part in God's revolution "on earth as in heaven" which has broken into history in the person of Jesus. Black Baptist minister and Civil Rights hero Martin Luther King Jr., used to repeatedly say, "No one is free if they fear death." He experienced this first hand being assassinated for his commitment to Christ's nonviolent love and how it challenged racism, war and poverty. "No one is free if they fear death" is the irony of losing our lives in the gospel. Now that we've faced our fate as people of God's love in a world of violence, our lives are now free to be parables of God's love. Particularly by the way we relate to those we might otherwise exclude.

Then we get to verse 48 in chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." For the Jewish audience it was clearly a reference to Leviticus 19:2 "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy". It is clearly a call to Imitatio Dei (To imitate God) but what is this God like that we are to imitate?

Many theologians have moved from reading Plato and Aristotle and have returned to verse 48 and have read into the word "perfect" the Greek idealism of the philosophers. Many liberal scholars today want to pass Jesus off as a wisdom teacher like the Cynics and say he was teaching us to have the moral perfectionism of this stagnant Greek deity that functioned as an ideal somewhere off in the distance. This however is a completely foreign way of thinking about God for Jesus if we are going to take his context (remember "a text without a context is a sign your being conned") and therefore his Jewishness seriously.

It would hardly make sense for Jesus to be criticising how pagans (non Jews) include only people like them in who they love in verse 47 and then in verse 48 to extol pagan ways of thinking! The word translated perfect in Matt.5:48 is "*teleios"* meaning "having reached its end" or "complete." This is why biblical scholars like Glen Stassen are suggesting Matthew 5:48 can more helpfully be translated, "Be complete [in love] as your heavenly Father is complete [in love]". Not only is it practical it fits the context of the passage with much more integrity than any weird command to be something we can't be (like be purple!!). It also fits with Luke's teaching on loving our enemies where the crescendo is "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" or "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate."

The Grace Participation Paradigm: A practical Holiness of inclusive, transformative love

For the Pharisees holiness was a matter of excluding; excluding the prostitute, excluding the leper, excluding the tax collector, excluding the demon possessed and the unclean. Many of us have seen in churches today where people that are pushed to the margins of society are also kept at the margins of faith communities. Yet in Jesus we see a God who includes zealot and tax collector, Greek and Jew, slave and free, female and male; all that others excluded in the interest of "holiness." Mathew and Luke both suggest that holiness is transfigured in Jesus. The practice of enemy-love is the practice of the holiness of God's revolution or "Kingdom," where outsides are not shunned but welcomed, held, and healed in transforming ways. Jesus provides for us a "grace participation paradigm" where though we are sinners, God's unfailing love shines and rains on us. We are invited to live God's grace in relating to all others, to be complete and all inclusive in transformational love just as our God is. Instead of killing, hiding, or suffocating what is impure, weak or dreaded by us in ourselves, our churches, in our communities and in our world, God holds all of it to be transformed. Even us! And we are not just saved from our old ways, we are saved into a people who by God's grace are invited into the dynamic deliverance that is participation in God's gracious reign, or Kingdom.

The good news of Jesus is that new life is not found in "must do" or "can't do" but that "God does" through us what we were created for. And God does it by grace! In the resurrection of Jesus we see that God's "perfect world project" has broken into history. The Anabaptist invitation to "walk in the resurrection" is the gospel's invitation to be filled with the power that raised Jesus from the dead, that is transforming creation, and that is made perfect in our weakness. Desperately our world, living through unjust wars and the destruction of God's good earth at a rate never before seen in history, needs people who embody such a fearless, redemptive, "perfect" love.

- **Jarrod McKenna**

A PROPHET OF GOD'S JUSTICE: RECLAIMING THE POLITICAL JESUS (PART 2)

Dr Chris Marshall
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In Part 1 that appeared in the last issue of ON THE ROAD, Chris introduced his article this way:

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

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

Part Two

JESUS' TWO-FOLD POLITICAL STRATEGY:

Broadly speaking Jesus' political stance was characterized by a prophetic denunciation of the injustices and social evils of the prevailing social order on the one hand, including a strident declaration of divine judgment on the existing centres of power responsible for oppression and injustice, and, on the other hand, by the calling together of an alternative community to live according to the standards of God's kingdom of justice and peace and thereby to model and effect the renewal of Israel as a whole. Commentators often underestimate the potential societal impact that such a "contrast society", planted in the heart of mainstream society, is capable of. But, as Gerhard Lohfink observes, "the anti-social and corrupt systems of a dominant society cannot be attacked more sharply than by the formation of an *anti-society* in its midst. Simply through its existence, this new society is a more efficacious attack on the old structures than any program, without personal cost, for the general transformation of the world".[i]

This twofold strategy of judgment and renewal, of confrontation and reconstruction, of political resistance and social revolution, is evident in at least four major areas of contemporary social life addressed by Jesus.[ii] And, to reiterate my underlying thesis, it is the priorities, values and commitments we see at work in Jesus' activity here that ought to furnish the normative framework for all subsequent political engagement in his name.

1. ***A rejection of social discrimination*****:** Supremely characteristic of Jesus was his orientation to the social margins – the destitute, the weak, social outcasts, women, children, Samaritans, the physically deformed, those in prison, the sick and the possessed. The dawning of the kingdom of God, insisted Jesus, was good news for the socially disadvantaged.[iii] It brought to them both the present comfort of knowing God's acceptance and blessing despite their social exclusion and often self-blame, and the reassurance that God was now at work, through Jesus and mission, to end their suffering and restore them to freedom and wholeness.

Jesus combated social discrimination at two levels. He openly criticised the self-righteous arrogance of the religious experts,[iv] and knowingly antagonized them by seeking intimate fellowship with sinners and outcasts.[v] At the same time, he assembled a new inclusive, egalitarian community in which the poor were to be given preference,[vi] the sick and the imprisoned cared for,[vii] women accorded dignity and equality,[viii] children esteemed as models to be emulated,[ix] and Samaritans and Gentiles embraced as equal objects of God's favour.[x] From this it follows that any modern political programme that marginalizes racial, ethnic or social groups, and which ignores or exacerbates the plight of the weak and downtrodden to promote the interests of the strong, even if it calls itself a "Christian" option, is diametrically opposed to the politics of Jesus.

2. ***A critique of economic exploitation:*** It is surely impossible to read Luke's Gospel without sensing Jesus' profound hostility to materialism and the relational and societal damage it causes. As an alternative source of security, the pursuit and hording of surplus wealth creates a barrier to radical trust in God and his kingdom.[xi] Moreover, in a patronage-based economy the concentration of massive riches in the hands of a few was evidence of structural injustice in society. The rich prospered at the expense of the poor. Jesus' words "for you always have the poor with you" should not be taken as a sign of his passive acquiescence to poverty in society.[xii] They are, in fact, an implied rebuke, for according to Deuteronomy 15:11 enduring poverty was evidence of a failure to keep the laws of the covenant by practicing mutual sharing and collective responsibility.

Jesus' use of the intriguing term "mammon of injustice" (Luke 16:9) may even imply that he saw in the single-minded pursuit of wealth an inherent tendency towards injustice. This is confirmed in his overt attack on the greedy rich of his day. "Woe to you who are rich now, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall hunger" (Luke 6:24-25). Jesus criticised the rich for three related evils: for accumulating unneeded surplus,[xiii] for ignoring the needs of the poor,[xiv] and for corruption and exploitation of the weak.[xv] It is in this connection that we should probably understand Jesus' climactic confrontation with the Temple establishment – which was undoubtedly his most overt and daring political-prophetic action.[xvi] There is no time to explore this extremely important episode here, but it was probably the way the Temple system had become integrated into the imperial system of domination and exploitation that Jesus most strongly objected to.[xvii]

By contrast, Jesus pronounced beatitude upon the poor. "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger, for you shall be full. Blessed are you who weep, for you shall laugh" (Luke 6:20-21).[xviii] Jesus is not here turning poverty, hunger and tears into "spiritual values" in themselves. The poor, the starving and the sorrowful are not blessed because of their condition but because God intends to *reverse* their situation. When God's kingdom comes in its fullness, poverty and pain will be no more. In the meantime, God's kingly power is at work in Jesus and his followers to bring healing and liberation and to create a new community to work against poverty, hunger and misery. Thus, as Klaus Wengst observes:

> …the beatitudes prove also to be declarations of war against poverty, hunger and tears: they are concerned for radical change. They look to the coming kingdom of God for this change...But this expectation is not just to be waited for; it has a reality in behaviour to match. When Jesus turns to those on the periphery, in his fellowship with his followers, people are already filled, already laugh, who would otherwise be pushed aside and have nothing to laugh about...the hungry are filled and...the domination of one person by another has come to an end.[xix]

Not only were the poor and hungry to find dignity and acceptance within the new community, but a whole new attitude to material possessions was to prevail therein. Following Jesus entailed a commitment to share one's material resources with those in need.[xx] A lifestyle of simplicity,[xxi] material dependence[xxii] and constant vigilance against the "deceitfulness of riches" (Mark 4:19) are to be the hallmarks of the new community. In these ways, Jesus' followers were to live 'as if' the provisions of the biblical Jubilee were being enacted in their midst.[xxiii]

How very different is the prevailing political landscape of global capitalist society today, which makes an idol of market forces, promotes consumerism as a means of political survival, and, while mouthing platitudes to the contrary, exacerbates the plight of the poor and dispossessed in pursuit of an ever-greater concentration of wealth and power.

3. ***A mistrust of governmental power:*** The ministry of Jesus was conducted in the context of an occupied country. Ultimate power resided in Rome but indigenous rulers were allowed to exercise jurisdiction over their own territories, as long as they did so in the interests of the empire. In Jesus' day, Galilee was controlled by Herod Antipas, while Judea was controlled by a Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, although internal affairs were administered by the Jewish Sanhedrin.

As a result, Jesus was confronted by three main forms of institutional or political power: the spiritual and domestic authority of the Jewish religious leaders, the civil authority of Herod and the Herodians, and the imperial and military authority of Rome. And he was critical of the way all three exercised their power.[xxiv] The basic presupposition of his political critique was that sovereignty or kingship belongs exclusively to God. God alone possesses ultimate authority in human affairs, and God's justice must be the measuring rod against which the exercise of all human authority is to be evaluated.

(i) Throughout his ministry Jesus was frequently opposed by *Jewish religious leaders*, both scribal and priestly. Jesus responded to their opposition with blistering denunciations of their conduct and role in society.[xxv] The most extensive example of this is found in Matthew 23. A careful reading of this chapter shows that it was not their theological views Jesus objected to; it was their misuse of religious power to

entrench injustice. They used God's law to "lock people out of the kingdom of heaven" and to overburden the weak without lifting a finger to help (vv 1-4,13-16). They abused their sacred trust to accrue personal prestige and kudos (vv.5-7).They presented themselves as paragons of virtue, but were full of extortion and greed within (v 25). They condemned the violence of the past, but were more than ready to shed innocent blood themselves (vv 23-39). Most tellingly, they majored on legal minutiae at the expense of what matters most to God: justice, mercy and faithfulness.

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel! (Matt 23:23-24).

(ii) The *Herodian* elite were also threatened by Jesus and sought to destroy him (Mark 3:6; cf. 12:15). When some sympathetic Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod Antipas is out to kill him, Jesus sends a message of defiance back to "that fox" (Luke 13:31-33). Later when tried by Herod, he refuses to co-operate with his interrogation (Luke 23:6-12).

(iii) Jesus was also critical of *Roman power*. It is true that Jesus never voiced direct opposition to Roman rule, and he never called for the violent expulsion of the Romans from the holy land. But this does not mean that he was indifferent to Roman control or secretly approved of it. Several considerations show he was not detached from this issue. To begin with, Jesus' entire mission *presupposed* a repudiation of the Roman boast that they had already introduced the Golden Age of "peace and stability". His proclamation of the kingdom of God was tantamount to a rejection of the *Pax Romana* as the order God intended. As Wengst observes, "anyone who prays for the coming of the kingdom of God, expects it very soon, and sees the sign of its dawning in his own action, has no faith in the imperial good tidings of a pacified world and human happiness in it; he does not regard this situation as the peace that God wants, but is certain that it will end soon".[xxvi] Jesus regarded the Roman *Pax* as a pseudo-peace and he refused to give his blessing to it.[xxvii] Indeed he recognised that his mission would destabilise the present "peaceful" order because it was based on oppression and injustice.[xxviii]

As well as this, Jesus' ethical teaching and whole manner of life constituted an *implicit* criticism of the abusive use of power by Rome. The gospels present a Jesus significantly at variance with the values and the patterns in terms of which the Romans built their empire. Jesus opts for the sick and the poor; the Romans despised the weak and rewarded the strong. Jesus stresses humility and service; the Romans took pride in their own superiority. Jesus stresses the sharing of surplus possessions; the Romans enacted oppressive taxes in order to increase the wealth of the metropolis of Rome and its predatory elites. Jesus emphasizes the sovereignty of God; the Romans affirmed pagan gods and the persona of the emperor. Jesus rejects the use of the sword; the Romans built an empire based on horrendous violence.[xxix]

Consistent with this, there are also several places where Jesus *explicitly* criticises the Roman authorities for way they exercised their power. In one saying, which Luke significantly places at the Last Supper immediately prior to his arrest, Jesus underlines the coercive and self-serving nature of Roman rule.[xxx] In another he speaks disparagingly of the material trappings of Gentile rule and says that greater respect is owed to the least in the kingdom of God than to kings and rulers.[xxxi] In yet

another he anticipates violence and murderous opposition to the gospel from Gentile governors and kings.[xxxii] Jesus' most important statement on Roman authority occurs in the so-called Tribute Question, which I have already commented on.[xxxiii]

As well as speaking critically of the abusive use of power in surrounding society, Jesus required his discipleship community to turn prevailing patterns of power and greatness upside down. In this new society, there is to be no hierarchy of status, as prevailed in the contemporary religious community.[xxxiv] There is to be do domination of the weak by the powerful, no lording it over one another in the manner of Gentile rulers.[xxxv] True greatness is shown by striving to be of least account![xxxvi] Leadership is servanthood.[xxxvii] And the wider social impact of the new kingdom community is not dependent on possessing human clout and influence, but on power of dependent faith, prayer and forgiveness.[xxxviii]

4. ***A repudiation of violence and war:*** Jesus knew full well that the existing system sanctioned violence to achieve its ends. He was well aware of the brutality of Roman rule. He spoke of Pilate's ruthlessness, and of how the Romans domineered their subjects.[xxxix] He knew that he himself would face torture and death at Roman hands,[xl] and that his followers also faced the prospect of persecution and crucifixion.[xli] He spoke gravely of the time ahead when the Romans would employ the dreadful horror of siege warfare against Jerusalem.[xlii] He also knew the violence that seethed beneath the surface of Jewish society.[xliii] Jesus was no starry-eyed idealist when it came to the subject of political violence.

Aware that the established order would use lethal force to oppose his kingdom-initiative, three existing options were available to him. He could take the Zealot option and strive to bring in the kingdom by military force. Or he could take the Qumran option and advocate the complete withdrawal of his messianic community into the desert away from the corruption of surrounding society. Or he could take the Establishment option and seek to make the best of a poor situation by co-operation or collaboration. Jesus rejected all three. Instead he chose the way of non-violent, sacrificial love and required the same of his followers (Matt 5:38-48). Jesus totally rejected war and violence as having any place in the exercise of God's rule. To fight for the kingdom with the weapons of the enemy was to lose the kingdom by default. To fight for the kingdom by turning the other cheek, going the second mile, praying for one's persecutors, loving one's enemies, was to achieve true victory over satanic evil. It was a revolutionary way of being revolutionary. As Wright observes:

> Anyone announcing the kingdom of YHWH was engaging in serious political action. Anyone announcing the kingdom *but explicitly opposing armed resistance* was engaging in doubly serious political action: not only the occupying forces, but all those who gave allegiance to the resistance movement would be enraged.[xliv]

It is here that Jesus' exorcisms carried an important political message. It was common in Jesus' day for people to ascribe the abject suffering of God's people under Roman rule to the activity of superhuman demonic forces standing behind their pagan oppressors and their indigenous quislings. One manifestation of this spiritual tyranny was the susceptibility of vulnerable individuals to demonic possession. When Jesus cast out demons, therefore, he was not only healing the victims of societal dysfunction; he was symbolically challenging and defeating the spiritual authorities standing behind foreign repression. This is made extremely clear by the military language and imagery used to describe the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac in

Mark 5:1-20, where a “legion” of demons is “dismissed” to enter a “troop” of unclean pigs, who then “charge” headlong down a slope and are “drowned in the sea”.[xlv] This episode is perhaps intended to underscore that personal and social liberation from the debilitating impact of colonial control is not to be achieved by military rebellion, and is not dependent on the violent expulsion of the Romans, but is available even now to those who embrace the renewing and peace-making power of God’s kingdom made available in Jesus.

Arguably it is by their compromise with military violence that the Christian credentials of so much conservative Christian politics are most open to question. It could not be sadder for Christian witness today that the two leading architects of the invasion of Iraq and the two most unapologetic proponents of the so-called war on terrorism are both confessing Christians who claim divine endorsement for their trust in the “tumult of war” (Hosea 10:14) instead of the “gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15) in their quest for international security.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God was a political gesture that impinged directly on the major dimensions of social and political life – the use of wealth and power, the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged from full participation in the wider community, and the employment of lethal violence to protect the unjust status quo. Jesus was critical of the prevailing social order and called for communal repentance (cf. Matt 11:20-24). He also laid down a new ethic for his followers so that they could serve as an instrument of societal renewal. In his messianic community, the weak are to be honoured, wealth is to be shared, leadership is to take the form of servanthood, and the way of non-violent, sacrificial love is to prevail. The vision of the coming kingdom *and its justice* is to be the supreme concern of its existence (Matt 6:33). That is to say, the primary formative power over its way of life is not the past or the present but the future, the new day coming, the time when God will put all things to right. As a colony of the age to come planted in the midst of the old order, the kingdom community is to serve both as an alternative expression of human community that summons mainstream society to change (a city set on a hill, Matt 5:14), and as a subversive force for change within the existing socio-political order (salt and light, Matt 5:13, 16).

Such also is to be the concern of the Christian community today, even if its social and political matrix is very different to that of first-century Palestine, and even though the task of translating Jesus’ political vision into concrete policies today is extremely difficult. But in broad terms, inasmuch as the biblical vision for the kingdom of God is the setting up of a universal realm of peace and justice on earth, the church as the community of the kingdom is called to a twofold political task. On the one hand, it is to proclaim the breakthrough of God’s new order by giving visible expression in its own life to the peace, justice and righteousness of God’s kingdom. On the other hand, it is to work tirelessly for peace and justice in surrounding society, to struggle against the forces of the old age – forces of nationalism, militarism, materialism, sexism and racism – which Christ has dethroned and which one day shall finally yield to God’s glorious future. Such is the politics of Jesus.

[i] G. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (London: SPCK, 1985), 95. So also J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1994), 40.

[ii] For the section that follows, see, more briefly, my *Little Book of Biblical Justice* (Intercourse Pa: Good Books, 2004), 49-64. No attempt will be made to assess the authenticity of the various sayings ascribed to Jesus, nor to delineate the redactional interests of the individual evangelists. The themes reviewed here are sufficiently pervasive in the gospel traditions to be confident that they substantially reflect the perspective of Jesus, even allowing for sometimes extensive redactional shaping of the materials by the gospel writers.

[iii] Luke 4:18-20; Matt 11:2-6/Luke 7:18-35.

[iv] See e.g., Matt 9:13; 21:31; Luke 6:24f;16:15.

[v] See e.g., Mark 2:15-17/Matt 9:10-13/Lk 5:27-30; Matt 11:19/ Luke 15:1-2; 19:1-10.

[vi] See e.g., Luke 14:12-24.

[vii] Matt 25:31-46.

[viii] See e.g., Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42; Mark 14:3-9; 15:40-41; John 3:7-38, etc.

[ix] Mark 9:36,42/Matt 18:1-5/Luke 9:46-48; Mark 10:13-16/Matt 19:13-15/Luke 18:15-17.

[x] See e.g., Mark 7:24-30/Matt 15:21-28; Mark 11:17; 13:10; Matt 8:5-13/Luke 7:1-10; Matt 12:18; 21:43/Luke 20:16; Matt 28:19-20; Luke 9:51-55; John 4:7-42.

[xi] Mark 4:19/Matt 13:22/Luke 8:14; Mark 10:17-31/Matt 19:16-30/Luke 18:18-30; Matt 6:21; Luke 12:16-21; 14:1-14; 16:13.

[xii] Mark 14:7/Matt 26:11/John 12:8.

[xiii] Luke 12:15-21; 16:19; 21:1-4; Matt 11:8.

[xiv] Luke 10:25-37; 16:19-27.

[xv] Mark 11:15-19; 12:40/Luke 20:47; Matt 23:23/Luke 11:42.

[xvi] Mark 11:15-18/Matt 21:12-13/Luke 19:45-46; John 2:14-22.

[xvii] The literature on this episode is now substantial, but see especially Herzog, *Jesus Justice*, 112-43, 191-99.

[xviii] On this see my essay "The Moral Vision of the Beatitudes: The Blessings of Revolution", in D. Neville & P. Matthews (ed.), *Faith and Freedom: Christian Ethics in a Pluralist Culture* (Sydney: Australian Theological Forum, 2003), 11-33.

[xix] Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Christ* (London: SCM, 1987), 65.

[xx] See e.g., Mark 10:17-30; Matt 6:2-4; Matt 7:7-11; Luke 6:35,38; 8:1-3; 12:32-34; 19:1-10; 14:25-35; John 12:6; 13:29.

[xxi] Matt 6:19-34/Luke 12:22-31.

[xxii] Mark 6:7-13, cf. Luke 9:38:10:4.

[xxiii] Wright, *Jesus and Victory*, 295.

[xxiv] For a brief summary see M. Hengel, *Christ and Power* (Dublin: Christian Journals, 1977), 15-21; J.D.G. Dunn, *Christian Liberty: A New Testament Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993), 27-52.. More fully see Alan Storkey, *Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker, 2005), 1-94.

[xxv] See e.g., Mark 7:6-23; 12:1-12, 41-44; 13:9-10; Luke 11:42-44; 16:14-14; 18:9-14.

[xxvi] Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 55.

[xxvii] Cf. John 14:27; 18:36.

[xxviii] Cf. Matt 10:34f; Luke 23:1-2

[xxix] See R. J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Society and Politics: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll N.Y: Orbis Books, 1983), 17.

[xxx] Luke 22:25 cf. Mark 10:42/Matt 20:25.

[xxxi] Matt 11:18/Luke 7:25.

[xxxii] Mark 13:9f/Lk 21:12-13; cf. Matt 24:9.

[xxxiii] Mark 12:13-17/Matt 22:15-22/Luke 20:20-26.

[xxxiv] Matt 23:8-12.

[xxxv] Mark 10:42-43.

[xxxvi] Mark 9:33-37/Matt 18:1-6/Luke 9:46-48; Mark 10:13-16/ Matt 19:13-15/Luke 18:15-17.

[xxxvii] Luke 22:26.

[xxxviii] Mark 11:20-25. On this passage, see Marshall *Faith as a Theme*, 159-74.

[xxxix] Luke 13:1; 22:24-27.

[xl] Mark 10:33-34/Matt 20:17-19/Luke 18:31-34.

[xli] Mark 13:9-10/Luke 21:12-13; Mark 8:34-38.

[xlii] Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; 23:27-31.

[xliii] Matt 23:29-36; Luke 9:7-9,19; 13:31-35; Mark 13:9-13.

[xliv] Wright, *Jesus and Victory*, 296, cf. 450, 465, 564-65.

[xlv] On this see Richard Dormandy, "The Expulsion of Legion: A Political Reading of Mark 5:1-20', *Expository Times* 93/10 (2000), 335-37; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1988), 190–94; Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 99-104.

Book Reviews

Constantine's Bible: Politics And the Making of the New Testament, by David L. Dungan, Fortress Press, 2007

The publisher's release for this book says: "Most college and seminary courses on the New Testament include discussions of the process that gave shape to the New Testament. Now in his latest book, ***Constantine's Bible***, David Dungan re-examines the primary source for this history, the ***Ecclesiastical History*** of the fourth-century Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, in the light of Hellenistic political thought. Dungan reaches startling new conclusions: that we usually use the term "canon" incorrectly; that the legal imposition of a "canon" or "rule" upon scripture was a fourth- and fifth-century phenomenon enforced with the power of the Roman imperial government; that the forces shaping the New Testament canon are much earlier than the second-century crisis occasioned by Marcion, and that they are political forces. Dungan discusses how the scripture selection process worked, book-by-book, as he examines the criteria used—and not used—to make these decisions. Finally he describes the consequences of the Emperor Constantine's tremendous achievement in transforming orthodox, Catholic Christianity into imperial Christianity." (http://www.ntgateway.com/weblog/2006/10/david-dungan-constantines-bible.html.)

Publishers Weekly says, "Beginning with a meticulous study of just what a canon is, Dungan offers a panoramic view of the first three centuries of Christian history and how the major players, both ecclesiastical and civil, contributed to defining the collection of writings we call the New Testament. One of the claims of the bestselling novel ***The Da Vinci Code*** is that the institution of the Catholic Church suppressed some writings that challenged its own views and agendas. Dungan, professor of religion at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, finds this view untenable and offers as evidence a long and detailed examination of the scripture selection process as documented by the fourth-century church historian Eusebius. While various schools of Christianity exerted pressure to either include or exclude certain works, he concludes that the selection process produced 'a minimalist canon, but one that is as hard as rock: all regional agendas have been intentionally ignored, all personal proclivities of prominent theologians or bishops dispensed with, every possible taint of `politicking' avoided.' Although written for the general reader, the book's detail can be overwhelming. But while his case for an orthodox canon is not unassailable, he succeeds in providing a wealth of information to enable readers to decide for themselves." (http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbninquiry.asp?r=1&ean=9780800637903.)

I did not find the details overwhelming but was caught up in the story Dungan tells so well. The book reminded me of Adam Nicolson's book ***God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*** (Harper Collins, 2003). Both books give background information on how these books, the Bible and the King James Version of the Bible, came to be.

Chapter six, "An Emperor Intervenes: Constantine Reshapes Catholic Christianity and its Scriptures," will be intriguing for Anabaptist readers. Dungan traces the influence the un-baptised Constantine had on

the church and how the church so easily caved-in to this new situation of being the favoured religion of the empire.

It is so easy today to just pick up the Bible and not think about the process of its formation. The early centuries of the church were full of political intrigue, violence, and struggles for power. Ramsay MacMullen gives these statistics in his recent book ***Voting About God in Early Church Councils*** (Yale, 2006):

"Our sources for the two-and–a-quarter centuries following Nicaea allow a very rough count of the victims of creedal differences: not less than 25,000 deaths. A great many, but still only a small minority, were clergy; the rest, participants in crowds." (56)

I agree with one reviewer who called ***Constantine's Bible*** "a readable and important book." It is important particularly for what it teaches us about the beginnings of Christendom.

-**MSH**

Development to a Different Drummer; Anabaptist/Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives,

Richard A. Yoder, Calvin W. Redekop, and Vernon E. Jantzi, Good Books, 2004

Some time back Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) sent out a book to each country office on the topic of development. It finally came up in my "to read" stack. ***Development to a Different Drummer; Anabaptist/Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives*** is a great compendium of the many angles of the Anabaptist experience in international service. The book had its beginnings in a development consultation in 1998 at Eastern Mennonite University examining Mennonite experience with overseas development.

Development to a Different Drummer is shaped around a series of essays from six persons' experiences at grassroots, mid-level and large-scale policy initiatives. It also contains a brief summary of development theories, a historical look at Mennonite experience in international development, a distillation of common assumptions and themes, a Mennonite ethical and theological framework for service, and an extensive synthesis. It would make a great study book for a retreat, Sunday school class, or college class on development or individual enrichment.

On the cover of the book is the central thesis question, "Mennonites are known around the world as a caring and ethical people. But are the results of their international development work successful? Have they confined themselves by working too much at the "village level?" Have we in MCC oriented ourselves too much toward the grassroots and, to put it rather crassly, shirked our duty at changing policy in favour of the grass roots in to the halls of power? In my mind, this question immediately raises the ever present tension between being the prophet and being the pastor. The prophet speaks to power; the pastor is an insider who midwives change from within.

Without giving too much of the book away, the editors try to address this question by uncovering common values in Mennonite

development work which include, people centeredness, service, integrity, mutuality, authenticity, humility and justice/peace orientation. In other surveys searching for core MCC values, a relational orientation has been affirmed as a central feature of the way we go about our "service in the name of Christ." Do these values resonate with you?

These values also suggest that our service in not unidirectional. Vernon Jantzi, one of the co-editors, states "Development as if people matter is not limited to what happens in a given locality..."(125) In other words, the transformation we hope in development is not just for "recipients" of our program or peace, it is for us to. Mutual transformation is assumed in our service. Does your work at development, peace and relief work transform your process? The editors also hope transformation extends into systems.

I met one of the co-authors of ***Development to a Different Drummer*** in Kathmandu a few weeks back. Richard (Rick) Yoder challenged me to think in terms of not only grass roots work but also shaping public policy. He writes in his chapter, "Why shouldn't we get our hands dirty by joining the public policy dialogue? Why shouldn't we be co-creators of the historical process? Who is better prepared to do public policy work than Anabaptists who have worked with MCC at the grassroots?" (196) Are we ready, personally and collectively, for greater levels of connectedness to decision making power on a global level?

- **Jon Rudy, MCC Asia Peace Resource**

Forgiveness in International Politics: An Alternative Road to Peace,

William Bole, Drew Christiansen SJ, Robert T. Hennemeyer, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

In 1848, Shaker Elder Joseph wrote the song "Simple Gifts." The lyrics to his profound, eloquent and powerful one verse song are as follows (sung to the tune of *Lord of the Dance*):

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gain'd,
To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come round right.

The Bush presidency is "staying the course" in the so called "war on terror." Any deviation from what he set his mind to is seen as weakness in a win/loose contest of bloody wills. "Staying the course" is linear thinking and a choice to take a "hard path" to problem solving. When it comes to the use of violence as a tool, addictive as it is, linear thinking is a blinkered view that precludes any options other than "more of the same." I wonder sometimes though, if "staying the course" is a euphemism for "no clue what else to try."

In the world of Elder Joseph's *Simple Gifts,* it is by *bowing and bending* that *we come round right*. This is a "soft path" world of possibilities, solutions and alternatives when it comes to problem solving. The Biblical tradition offers *bowing and bending* ideas to address the inevitable conflicts that crop up in community. Speaking truth in love (Eph. 4:15 NIV), justice and mercy (Mat. 23:23) and forgiveness (Acts 13:38) are just a few of these ideas. Sadly, the church has not always appealed to the use of these values when counselling the state.

And why not? Why hasn't forgiveness featured in American politics? Could it be that politicians of all stripe and creed do not believe in the ability of forgiveness to actually be a viable foreign policy strategy in an era of "realpolitik?" That would be a staggering condemnation for the current climate of statecraft in America, arguably one of the most vocally "Christian" in recent years. Faith devoid of forgiveness and reconciliation is a sham and makes a mockery of John 3:16 and all that is central to God's plan of salvation.

The book under review, ***Forgiveness in International Politics; An Alternative Road to Peace*****,** is an effort "translate forgiveness into the idiom of contemporary international relations (179). It is also an effort to re-centre the Church to the "soft path" of Christ and his *bowing and bending* example. The book comes out of a series of conferences sponsored by the Woodstock Theological Centre and the United States Conference of catholic Bishop's Office of International Justice and Peace (vi). ***Forgiveness in International Politics*** seeks to move the discussion about forgiveness beyond individual understandings to something useful in the international arena. It is not a personal "how to" book but a scholarly look at some of the most current thinking on the topic. Case studies of recent conflicts in the Balkans, Rwanda and Northern Ireland, places where Catholics have no small influence, help ground the discussion in complex reality.

The book tackles head on the complicity of the church in some of the heinous crimes of the latter half of the 20th century. It helps the reader differentiate actions of some church leaders which led to violence, on the one hand, and the capacity of the church as an institution to foster peace on the other. This tacit acknowledgment, on the part of these Catholic Bishops, of the churches failure is actually one step in a forgiveness process that includes truth telling and acknowledgment of participation in victimizing others. This transparency with the churches shortcomings frees up peacebuilders to "mine religious resources" for reconciliation (152ff).

"Staying the course" is not achieving an end to the so-called "war on terror." Perhaps forgiveness is one foreign policy strategy that will cause us *to turn, turn will be our delight, [and by] turning, turning we come round right.*

- **Jon Rudy, MCC Asia Peace Resource**

Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement, edited by Mark D. Baker, Baker Academic, 2006

Mark D. Baker is associate professor of mission and theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, USA. He has authored three books on his own and co-authored two on the atonement. He describes the latter two books on his website (http://www.mbseminary.edu/baker/atonement). The major question he is trying to answer is "How does the cross and resurrection provide salvation?" Baker says:

"***Recovering the Scandal of the Cross***, (Inter Varsity Press, 2000), the book I co-authored with Joel Green, contends that if the New Testament writers use diverse images to proclaim the saving significance of the cross, then we should too! Viewing penal satisfaction theory as the one correct explanation of the atonement has made it difficult for many to see the diversity of images in the New Testament. It also impedes our ability to develop alternative contemporary images. How do we help people embrace a wider understanding of the cross and resurrection?"

While his first book on the atonement examined the biblical and theological issues surrounding the atonement, this latest contribution deals with the issue of "proclaiming" the atonement in contemporary contexts. Each chapter is by a different author with comments by Baker at the start and finish of the chapters. Contributors include Richard B. Hays, C.S. Lewis, Brian D. McLaren, Rowan Williams, and others.

Baker Academic is the publisher but the book is not an academic tome. The twenty chapters are short, readable, and practical. They include sermons, excerpts from books, and even ideas from kid's Sunday school classes. A variety of contexts are represented from Africa to suburban Los Angeles. One of the contributions comes from Steve Taylor, pastor at Opawa Baptist Church in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Taylor uses the image of a diamond to talk about the many facets of the message of atonement. Baker says only a few of these many images are explored in this book. He ends by saying "My hope is that if we can move away from penal satisfaction as *the one* full explanation of the saving significance of the cross and include other metaphors and images like those in this book, we will create more space for hearing the other facets of the scandal of the cross." (189)

I highly recommend this book and hope it will inspire more creative ways of proclaiming God's salvation in our time.

- **MSH**

Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition, C. Arnold Snyder,
(Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series) Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2004

The *Traditions of Christian Spirituality* series now stretches out, with an apparent drive to ecumenical completeness to a total of eighteen volumes. To include in the series an account of the Anabaptist tradition of spirituality may at first glance seem to be excessively stretching the boundaries of Christian spirituality. How might we bring Menno Simons, Conrad Grebel and Pilgram Marpeck, to quote the names of a few leading figures from the early Anabaptist movement, into this conversation?

The answer is that bringing about that engagement turns out to be not all that difficult after all. Indeed, the account of "spirituality" in the Preface to the Series by the Editor Philip Sheldrake might have been written especially with this volume on Anabaptist spirituality in mind. After lamenting that contemporary searches for spirituality have largely ignored the Christian traditions in general, Sheldrake argues that:

From a Christian perspective spirituality is not just concerned with prayer or even with narrowly religious activities. It concerns the whole of human life, viewed in a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and within a community of believers. (p.12*)*

In not only linking faith and life but in providing a communal location and context for Christian spirituality, Sheldrake has distanced his project from many contemporary expressions of spirituality. He has also provided a framework into which an account of Anabaptist spirituality fits very neatly indeed.

My case on the close connection between spirituality and life in the Anabaptist tradition is clearly illustrated by the location and treatment of the section on spirituality in the ***Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective*** (1995). Article 18 of the Confession is devoted to 'Christian Spirituality' and is the second article in the section that deals with the theme of discipleship.

The author of this volume C. Arnold Snyder is Professor of History at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, Canada and has researched and written extensively on the history and theology of the early Anabaptists. He has a deep and detailed knowledge of the medieval spiritual and theological roots of the early Anabaptists. Snyder is deeply faithful in this volume to the emphasis in his tradition on spirituality as being integrally linked with discipleship and presents the substance of Anabaptist spirituality as one that de-constructs any attempt to settle for a do-it-yourself, spiritualty 'lite'.

The account of Anabaptist spirituality in this volume draws heavily on testimonies and confessions of tradespeople and peasants in response to questioning while under arrest or awaiting execution. Snyder introduces us to a sample of these as we work our way through the major issues and practices of the movement. We have here then a lay spirituality that while it engaged on occasions with academic discourse, was not confined in its practice to the educated groups within society.

This is a well-written volume that is accessible to the non-academic reader, though demanding in terms of its challenge to our lives and churches. In organising the book, the author has been aware that many of the potential readers would have little knowledge of the historical roots of the Anabaptist tradition. Chapter One, therefore, opens with a brief historical sketch of the emergence of the movement in its respective

Swiss Brethren, South German/Austrian and North German/Dutch forms. Having set out the historical context of the movement, Snyder then provides an account as to why the Anabaptist tradition needs to be approached as being neither Catholic nor Protestant, or perhaps as both Catholic and Protestant. Ascetic Catholic piety and reforming Protestant emphases were retained and uniquely shaped in the crucible of the early decades of the movement. Snyder is confident in asserting that by about 1560 the scattered Anabaptist groups that had survived the assault of the established church and state power were clear that their way forward lay with neither Wittenberg, Geneva, nor Rome. The form of Anabaptist distinctiveness set out in the first chapter is critical to understanding the account of spirituality that follows.

In the opening to Chapter One, Snyder sets out his basic thesis in terms of a spirituality that embraces both the inner and outer dimension of our life. *The visible features of the Anabaptist understanding of the faithful Christian life – the baptism of adults and living in faithful and active discipleship are certainly best known and most easily recognised. However, they are only part of the story. What is less well known and what will occupy us particularly in this volume, is the spiritual understanding and practice that undergirded, nourished and defined the visible Anabaptist witness. (p.16)*

What lies behind the Anabaptist spirituality is a form and practice of church. Indeed, it would be safe to say that the church is the nearest thing to the traditional understanding of a sacrament in the Anabaptist tradition. While the practice of churching is not dealt with until Chapter Five, it provides the skeleton for all the preceding chapters.

Each of the subsequent chapters is substantial and tempted this reviewer down the path of detailed quotation and discussion. Much of the spirituality described picks up themes that cut across the grain of contemporary culture. While on first glance they may seem attractive to those of conservative evangelical disposition, on closer inspection they are likely to prove somewhat more radical and unsettling in their implications. The account of the foundational theme of the fear of the Lord, for example, carries with it the corollary that there is no reason to fear any created being, leading to fearlessness in the face of those who exercise political power.

Discipleship, a key theme in the Anabaptist tradition has its roots here. Following Christ with its outward implications in peacemaking, economics and mutual service has its roots in a dying to self and the world and an embracing of the cross even if it costs all that one holds dear in life. This yieldedness ‘gelassenheit’ commences deep within the human heart. The outer and the inner dimensions are inextricably linked.

Each of the remaining chapters reflects this dynamic of the linkage of the inner and the outer. While the difference in the theology and practice of baptism between the churches of “Christendom” and the Anabaptists is well known, this account throws fresh light on the spirituality of baptism and its ascetic and communal significance including interesting parallels with the process of profession in monastic orders.

In an era where being a Christian is being reduced to an internal disembodied matter, of “a personal relationship to Jesus”, and where participation in a church community shaped by a consumerist practice of

"church shopping", Chapter Five "The Body of Christ" is clearly counter-cultural in its implications.

Spiritual power and outward witness are inextricably tied together in the practice and theology of church. There is a deeply communal and embodied character to the understanding of the church that denied the spiritualist emphasis on the inner experience and insisted on the significance of the outward ordinances of baptism, fraternal admonition, the supper of remembrance and the practice of footwashing.

The Anabaptists …were convinced that when the living Spirit of God in believers worked to bring them together by the outward signs and ceremonies of their unity (as ordained by Christ) the result would be the establishment of the very Body of Christ in the world visibly working through his members. … for it was in the church – thus conformed, united and marked – where one would find the "real presence" of Christ in the world. The real presence of Christ depended not on proper priestly administration, nor on human power of any kind, but rather on the living power of God, who alone could accomplish the work through the faith, trust, Gelassenheit, and obedience of believers. (pp.109-110)

Snyder draws heavily on testimonies and confessions of tradespeople and peasants in response to questioning while under arrest or awaiting execution. This is a lay spirituality not primarily one of academic origins. The other distinctive of Anabaptist spirituality that needs noting is that relating to martyrdom, or 'the baptism in blood'. In the Anabaptist understanding baptism in the Spirit led to baptism in water. Water baptism pointed beyond itself in the bodily commitment to following Jesus in bodily suffering, if necessary to death. Faith was less about believing than about trusting evidenced in yielded obedience and in life, wherever it might lead, through acceptance of the discipline of the community and the testing of persecution.

At the end of this account of Anabaptist spirituality focussed on the first fifty years of the movement's emergence, Snyder provides a closing chapter in which he briefly sketches out the significance of this tradition for our time. I have to acknowledge that I found this chapter challenging and distressing. The challenge comes in its call to yieldedness and the linking of this to a spirituality of non-violence.

… the Anabaptist call to radical discipleship insists that disciples are those who allow the spiritual power of the risen Christ to manifest itself in their lives. The disciples of Jesus will live lives that remind the world of Jesus, not because they are super-human rule-keepers, but because they have yielded to the power of the risen Christ in their lives. It is this spirit of 'Gelassenheit" of 'yieldedness', that corresponds to a non-violent life, a life that refuses to insist on the forceful imposition of one's will on the world. (p. 186)

My distress comes with the need for a communal expression of such a spirituality and its absence in our time and place. Where can such a community be found to form and sustain such a spirituality in a time in Australia where an individualising spirituality is taken for granted?

- **Doug Hynd, Canberra**