ON THE ROAD

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The 2000s: the decade in review

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General News and Articles

From the Editor

Nathan Hobby

I'm ending this decade with less certainties than I began it, and less zeal—but hopefully more wisdom. What have the noughties brought for you in your faith and thinking?

This is the theme of a number of our articles in this issue, as we look back on the decade we've just come to the end of. It's probably going to take some time to understand this decade adequately, but here's some early attempts.

I set difficult challenges to three of our stalwarts—Doug Sewell to write a history of the AAANZ in the noughties and Doug Hynd and Mark Hurst to pick out the ten books of the decade for Anabaptists. All of them have come up with admirable responses.

Doug's history of our movement through the decade is important reading for all AAANZ members to take stock of where we've been and give some direction to where we're going next.

The lists of books of the decade are a great starting point if you are wondering what to read next.

We've heard a lot about new monasticism in *On The Road* lately, and I think it's essential that we keep following up on important themes like this. With that in mind, we present to you another article by Gordon Preece on new monasticism, this one first published in the socialist journal, *Arena*.

Australia's response to asylum seekers was an issue dominating the political agenda in the noughties; now it has returned at the end of the decade and Jarrod McKenna has written a great opinion piece on the issue.

Our members have been busy; Moriah Hurst has also written a great testimony to her life and beliefs, originally given at a forum on Christianity and War in Sydney.

That's this issue; next issue we go eschatological. Do you spend much time thinking about death, resurrection, the return of Christ, hell and the nature of eternal life? These are topics worth exploring from an Anabaptist perspective and so the theme for our next issue is 'Last Things'. See the back page for more details. The deadline is 8 March 2010. 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

"Life is a constant Advent season: we are continually waiting to become, to discover, to complete, to fulfil. Hope, struggle, fear, expectation and fulfilment are all part of our Advent experience."

(CONNECTIONS, 28-11-93)

Most of us are not good at waiting. We want instant gratification. Therefore, instructions like "wait on the Lord" are strange to us. Having a season like Advent where we focus on waiting is good for us.

We remember the stories of longing for the Messiah to come and their fulfilment in Jesus' birth. We also long for the Messiah's second coming and the fulfilment of God's kingdom "on earth as in heaven".

At Christmas, we celebrate the end of some of the waiting. God chose to have Jesus come and live among us. The Gospel of John says "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. … From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." (1:14, 16) That is a gift to celebrate – "grace upon grace."

However, we still long for God's reign to come in its fullness. This time of waiting and longing is not a time of doing nothing. Each year we return to Howard Thurman's quote to remind us of our post-Christmas task.

The Work of Christmas

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the Kings and Princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flocks,

The work of Christmas begins.

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry

To release the prisoner,

To teach the nations,
To bring Christ to all,

To make music in the heart.

While waiting may be good for us, it is not always easy. We are experiencing a different season of waiting as well. We are waiting for our funding to come in so we can resume our work as mission workers here in OZ and NZ. Our trip to North America during October and November was a wonderful time of re-connecting with old congregations who support us and visiting new ones. A new Ministry Support Team (MST) formed and we visited family and friends. However, we did not reach our financial goal so we are currently unemployed.

In the last issue of *On The Road*, we wrote, "It would be easy to get discouraged through this wearing process – and we have our days – but overall we have a sense of peace that God is in control. If this does not work, then God has something else for us." We still hold to that and praise God for all the "grace upon grace" we daily experience.

AAANZ: the last 10 years

By Doug Sewell

A tentative start

Scepticism and excitement. That's how I'd describe my mixed first impressions of Anabaptism in Australia. What place could Anabaptism—a remote sectarian movement almost 500 years old—have in Australia? My first contact with Australian Anabaptists was at the Anabaptist Conference held in Wollongong NSW in June 1999. Sixteen years earlier I had visited the Mennonite Centre in London where I met Alan and Eleanor Kreider. The Centre provided hospitality to travellers and a place to talk about an Anabaptist understanding of church and culture. When the Kreiders visited Australia years later they introduced me to Mark and Mary Hurst.

I observed in Wollongong a small committed group mostly with theological backgrounds articulating the relevance of Anabaptist core convictions to a secular post-Christendom culture. The talk of peace, reconciliation and community values captured my imagination. The new association was struggling to find its feet and secure Australian residency for the Hursts as pastoral workers with most financial support coming from Eastern Mennonite Mission USA. I didn't really understand then the breadth of the vision that had brought this group together.

AAANZ AGM June 1999

Beginnings

The beginnings go back to May 1995 when 18 people attended "A Call to Gather: Anabaptism in Australia" in Tasmania. The outcome of that international gathering was the birth of the Anabaptist Network. The group decided they wanted the Hursts to return to Australia as pastoral workers and resource persons for the network. The Network was incorporated in July 1998 as the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc (AAANZ). The first issue of the *AAANZ Newsletter* followed in the same month. It was not until the 6th issue in November 1999 that the name *On the Road* (*OTR*) was given to the quarterly journal. The February 2000 *OTR* listed 32 members.

The *AAANZ* executive met by telephone conferencing and their discussion revolved around identifying the association as a network of people not a conference of churches or groups. There was no intention of trying to become a denomination. A Statement of Purposes for the Association was written that identified words like *to nurture and support, to network and link, to resource and extend awareness and to affiliate*. The emphasis was on encouraging one another in discipleship, "following Jesus on the road!"

By 2001 the Association was entering a new stage in its life and ministry. At the AAANZ Conference in Melbourne the key theme that emerged from the reflection of the members was the potential role for the Association to network and provide resources for a range of initiatives in peacemaking and community and church building across Australia in which the Anabaptist tra-

dition was finding a living expression. The Perth Anabaptist Fellowship began meeting in September 2001 as a local expression of an intentional community comprising several households.

The enormous efforts of Mark and Mary Hurst as the pastoral workers were central to the growth of the network. They travelled extensively around Australia and across the Tasman Sea building close relationships amongst a diverse range of people. Before their appointment AAANZ had prepared a set of selection criteria to find a pastoral worker. One criterion was "a positive appreciation of the theological diversity of the Christian Church and willingness to learn from and contribute to the ecumenical discussion." Mark Hurst was also chosen for his knowledge of the history, ecclesiology and ethical vision of Anabaptist churches and his ability to articulate and represent clearly the distinctives of the Anabaptist tradition. Mark produced the regular email stream of AAANZ Mailings for a wide readership. Mark's appointment as a pastoral worker was formalised in January 2001.

Mark and Mary Hurst

Mary's pastoral and teaching role in their ministry was formally acknowledged several years later when the job was split equally between the two. In reality they were both working full time in their shared capacity, which was an indication of their dedication to building Anabaptism down under.

Conferences as waterholes

The AAANZ conferences held in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, and then every two years in 2005, 2007 and 2009 were gathering places, like waterholes, for Anabaptists and interested people to engage in conversation and articulate the mission. The conference attendees progressively grew in number.

The January 2001 conference at Whitley College in Melbourne was on "Peacemaking, Reconciliation, and Mission". The speakers were Marita Munro, Mark and Mary Hurst, Gordon Preece, Ross Langmead and Tim Costello. Worship was held at the Collins Street Baptist Church in Melbourne's CBD and at Truth and Liberation Concern. The message of the conference was a study of 16th Century persecuted Anabaptists. One paper described, "Theirs was a conviction that being a Christian meant seriously following the teachings of Jesus, to be radically discipled to Him and to one another. The cutting-edge of Jesus' teachings, and particularly of the Sermon on the Mount, were earthed in their lives, relationships and witness. This stark Christian practice lies in contrast to the spiritualising and other worldliness of the Gospel message that marks areas of church practice in their day and ours. Perhaps the movement is best known for their commitment to peacemaking and reconciliation."

The conference at Morling Baptist College in Sydney in June 2002 was given the title "Mission with an Anabaptist Twist" and looked at urban church planting. Stuart Murray Williams from the Anabaptist Network in Great Britain was invited to speak. The conference looked at Hope Street, an urban mission initiative in the inner area of Sydney as a specific case study. The conference saw church planting as being both "ecclesiological as well as evangelical - aimed at renewal of the church as well as evangelism. Church planting is not just about more churches, but also about the development of new and more diverse ways of being the church that are biblically rooted and cul-

AAANZ Conference 2003

AAANZ Conference January 2005

AAANZ Conference January 2007

turally appropriate. One reason we need new churches is that, although reform of existing local churches is to be encouraged, it is uncertain how radical the renewal of existing church structures can be. New ways of being church need also to be new ways of telling the story of Jesus and helping people to encounter him. The word 'church' should be seen as dynamic, an activity, a verb rather than a noun."

The conference held at Otford south of Sydney in January 2003 reflected around the theme of "Peace Church – how to sustain a peacemaking community in a time of violence". How can the community that we call church sustain its witness to God's shalom and non-violence in a time when the war in Iraq was about to begin and in which violence seems the endemic response to conflict? The multi-themed conversations explored peace with God, peace with oneself, peace with the church, peace with neighbours and peace in the world.

A convention centre on the bushfire-ravaged outskirts of Canberra was the site for the January 2005 conference attended by forty-seven participants. The theme was "Christianity and Violence" with Dr. Chris Marshall as the main speaker. In the first of three talks, "Terrorism, Religious Violence and Restorative Justice," Marshall said religious groups need to respond to violence in five ways: affirm the validity of protest; engage in interfaith dialogue; improve grassroots/lay education; do faith-based dispute resolution; and undertake a "terror-audit" of their own group. "Violence is the primary manifestation of sin in the world," according to Marshall, who spoke about the possibility of transformation even for terrorists with the Apostle Paul as a first-century example. He saw in Anabaptist theology an alternative to crusading and just war theology and something positive to offer a world facing annihilation.

William Oates, an Aboriginal professor at Central Queensland University spoke about the need for "being wise" when looking at issues of violence in Australia. "We need a closer look at issues that are very complex. Don't judge by appearances nor make a decision based on hearsay," he said. He spoke about the Aboriginal need for "mentors" and "mates" and called for partnership and mutuality. He ended his talk with the biblical invitation to "Come, let us rea-

son together."

"Living Anabaptism - seeking a community of promise" was the theme of the January 2007 conference held at Fairbridge Village, Pinjarra in Western Australia. Hosted by people from the Perth Anabaptist Fellowship the conference provided a live-in model for community with delegates living and sharing meals in a cluster of houses in a bushland setting. The conference saw a move from a theological emphasis to a more hands-on practical approach to living in an Anabaptist way. The main talks were structured around the practices of the church identified by Anabaptist theologian John Yoder in his book, *Body Politics*. Yoder recovers the Lord's Supper and baptism as essential parts of the church's common life, practices with political and social importance. He adds to them the ministry of all believers, admonishment and discernment, and the open worship meeting to give us an exciting picture of living Anabaptism together. Nathan Hobby produced a study guide and summary of *Body Politics*. Workshop topics included caring for creation through permaculture, Anabaptist house churches and small groups, Anabaptism and art, living in community and Anabaptist worship.

Ray Gingerich 2007

AAANZ Executive 2008

The January 2009 conference held at Mt Evelyn near Melbourne saw the largest number attending. The conference took a different direction with *AAANZ* running the program in partnership with other groups, such as the Community of Transfiguration, Jesus Generation, Peace Tree, Urban Seed and UNOH. The conference was a gathering of kindred spirits to explore "Communities of the Kingdom - New Monasticism and Anabaptism". Links were made between the Anabaptists and the new movements of discipleship and faith. The groups wrestled with the challenges of being in community and how relationships need to be grounded in a spirit of grace.

Casper and Erin Adson

A wider circle

I took over the AAANZ president's role in January 2007 from Doug Hynd who was President both before and after Ross Coleman (2003-2005). I felt there was a need for the Anabaptist Association to look beyond itself and to widen its circle. My first priority was to grow the membership base in order to become sustainable. Readers of the AAANZ Mailings and *On the Road* were invited to join as members. I reasoned that membership bestowed a sense of ownership that is vital to growth. I wanted to encourage members to develop closer bonds between individuals within the network.

To help explain Anabaptism more resources were needed and the website made more interactive to simply and clearly allow people to understand contemporary Anabaptism and how to get involved. To broaden and strengthen the network AAANZ agreed to partner more with other groups who shared similar values. We recognised that we were not the only ones on a journey of discipleship and had a lot to learn from others who had been on that road for longer than most of us had. This meant dialogue at first and shared strategies. A couple of AAANZ members attend the "Historic Peace Churches - Asia Peace Conference" in Solo City, Indonesia, in December 2007.

Telling our story and growing the Anabaptist network became the main focus in 2007. *The Story of the Anabaptists* was uploaded on YouTube. The Hursts return to the USA for one year opened the way for extended speaking tours by Professors Ray Gingerich and Vernon Jantzi from Eastern Mennonite University. Both Australia and New Zealand suffer a tyranny of distance that engenders isolation. The network forged connections between individuals but also suffered from an inherent weakness in its inability to link up people in real relationships. Gingerich and Jantzi both identified the

disconnection felt by many they spoke with during their travels.

Dave and Ange Andrews

A broader dialogue

The professors' visits stimulated considerable dialogue with people from outside of the network. The increased interest resulted in several radio broadcasts in Australia. The *Encounter* program called "The Anabaptist Vision" on ABC National Radio brought the Anabaptist network and values of Christian non-violence to the attention of the listening public. ABC presenter Gary Bryson described Anabaptism as "a theological vision that informs the practice and faith of Christians of many different traditions and also a vision to redefine the church."

Angie O'Gorman

New connections saw AAANZ people team up with others in the Sydney Network, the Canberra based School of Discipleship, Urban Vision in Wellington and Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). AAANZ agreed to partner with Quakers in Australia and New Zealand to form a regional Christian Peacemaker Teams Australasia. CPT enabled Christian teams to go to places of conflict to be a peacemaking presence. Erin and Casper Adson, members of AAANZ, travelled throughout Australia in 2008 to talk about their time with CPT in Hebron, Israel. The Adsons spoke personally about how their lives had been turned upside down by the power of creative non-violence. Their alternative narrative of the Israeli and Palestinian story brought new insight to the long-standing and complex conflict. The opportunities for Christians to engage in direct action as peacemakers generated huge interest amongst a wide spread of churches including Baptist, Catholic, Quaker and the Uniting Church of Australia.

Irene's Place was a joint venture started by AAANZ, Canberra Baptist and Mennonite Mission Network USA. A house in Canberra offers a one-year residential program for young adult interns to promote the teachings of peace and non-violence by living in community and practicing everyday faith.

Dreamings

The *AAANZ* executive came together in February 2008 for a weekend retreat at Bundeena south of Sydney to do some dreaming for the network and set some future directions. Bundeena House a large rambling weatherboard cottage borders the Royal National Park and looks across a long beach and the blue waters of Port Hacking. For some of the executive, it was the first time they had met face to face. An international connectedness with a strong New Zealand representation had been a recent area of growth. Paul McMahon and Margaret Young came from Christchurch and Mark Barnard from Auckland. Jarrod McKenna came from Perth, Ed Love from Launceston, Doug Hynd from Canberra and Gary Baker from Armidale. Ian Packer, Sally Longley along with Mark and Mary Hurst and myself rounded off the team. Each had encouraging stories to tell from their regions about growing partnerships, new table fellowship groups and a home base for Mark and Mary Hurst on the north side of Sydney.

The first evening was spent giving time to some dreaming: What could the Anabaptist network look like five years from now? The following morning some of the dreams were unpacked. Images of complex interactive webs that resemble Anabaptist networking were drawn on paper; another picture was riding a wave when the timing is correct and how in the future our reach will not be constrained to physical place as new technologies emerge. As the weekend progressed the group moved on from dreaming to consider the realities and listed the opportunities and constraints that affect life and mission as a network. AAANZ faced major challenges of sustainability. We identified the temptation to try to do too much. Twelve achievable objectives were identified for the next two years. The objectives were grouped into three main areas with strategies and time frames developed for each. This was the list of main objectives:

- Articulating and communicating our Story
- Growing and sustaining our Network
- Building relationships and partnerships

Ways of networking

A Prayer Diary and Directory was started which has been regularly sent to members. The diary enabled members to support other in prayer daily. The directory also provided opportunities for members to host and visit each other.

A new way of networking together by phone was tried

AAANZ Conference January 2009

by *AAANZ* in May 2008 when Tom and Christine Sine's visit to Australia created an opportunity to host its first international phone conversation. Tom and Christine met for a table fellowship at the Sydney home of Ian and Libby Packer with about a dozen people. *AAANZ* members around Australia and New Zealand could call a toll free number to join the discussion.

In August 2008 members joined a phone chat with Dave Andrews. Dave and his wife Ange, members of AAANZ, had lived and worked in intentional communities with marginalised groups of people in Australia and Asia for more than thirty years. They lived in a large joint household with their children, grandchildren and others in an inner city community in Brisbane. Dave spoke about his new book that rescues the Be-Attitudes from obscurity and uses them for Plan Be – "being the change we want to see in the world".

Tim Costello was the next speaker at the AAANZ members' phone chat at the end of the year. Tim talked about the imperatives of dealing with climate change and his personal experience of its deadly effect on the poor living in low lying coastal areas of Myanmar after the devastating cyclone in May 2008. These were followed in 2009 by two stimulating phone conversations. The first with Moriah Hurst presented the challenges of including youth and young adults in our community life. In the second, American peace theologian Angie O'Gorman talked about peacemaking growing out of an understanding of God as the creator and lover of all people.

Shaping a vision

In the middle of 2009 the *AAANZ* executive felt the need to clarify its vision, mission and values and to produce an operational manual that could be handed on to future leaders. The core values were developed as the Association's vision statement:

- Jesus is the centre of our Faith
- Community is the centre of our Life
- Reconciliation is the centre of our Work

AAANZ is in the process of forging a new partnership with Mennonite Mission Network (MMN), which is the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA and supports ministry in more than 50 countries. The Hursts will become independent workers for AAANZ. They have spent a large part of 2009 building a new Mission Support Team in North America under the guidance of MMN. The end of 2009 sees this process still very much up in the air, as funding is not yet secured.

As people who are seeking to understand and actively live out as individuals and communities what it means to be Anabaptists today we share with an increasingly global network of Anabaptists a desire to engage people and cultures with the gospel and to foster a missional identity in the church.

What happened to PAF?

Perth Anabaptist Fellowship 2001-2007: A Memoir

By Nathan Hobby

Some of PAF with visiting Bruderhof in February 2007.

For much of the decade, Perth had an Anabaptist house-church. It started small, grew big - for a house church - shrunk and then dispersed. For those of us involved, it was a major part of our lives. This is a memoir rather than a history; there are at least ten different versions of the story of Perth Anabaptist Fellowship - PAF -- and I am only offering my own experience.

PAF had already been going for over a year when I joined in 2003. It had been started by Brad and Marina Schilling, Ian and Ann Duckham, Ross and Julie McKinnon and for a short time, Ian and Libby Packer, just before they moved to Melbourne.

Before joining PAF, I was running a course on John Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* with the PAF members – by then, only the Duckhams and Schillings. A lot of people in my circle were talking about *Politics of Jesus*, and for several years I'd had a vision of reading it closely and trying to put it into practice. Talking to Brad and Marina, we decided on a course, going chapter by chapter through the book.

When we got to the first week, I decided to simplify the first chapter, because it was difficult to understand. It worked so well, I kept going week after week. Stubbornly, we persisted chapter by chapter right through the book. It was the time of the Iraq War. Some weeks we had twenty people; other weeks four or five. James Patton, as well as a bunch of young Christian radicals – Jarrod McKenna, his future wife Teresa Lee, Harry Wykman, my brother Joshua and his future wife, Amy Fitzpatrick – came along to the Yoder course and later started coming to PAF.

In 2004, when these radicals moved to Lockridge to form the Christian community eventually called Peace Tree, I moved to Lesmurdie in the hills where the Schillings and the Duckhams were living for the sake of being church better.

These were the glory days, as we grew and grew over that year. At our peak, we were getting twenty-five along to the church, squeezing into lounge rooms we really didn't fit. Key members Matthew Hesketh, Tim James and Megan Sheard all joined around this time. It all seemed easy back then. We were taking Jesus literally, we were doing church like the New Testament – and it was working.

Each week we came together and sang songs, discussed the Bible readings from the lectionary – often using Lectio Divina – shared about our lives, and ate together. We rotated houses and rotated leaders. We were involved in each other's lives, and we were a participatory church, trying hard to live as the body of Christ.

But we didn't handle conflict well. I blame myself for some of that. I had trouble saying difficult things to people and I tried to keep the peace at any cost. Of

course, avoiding conflict doesn't make it go away.

My future wife, Nicole James, visited the church for the first time the day after the 2004 election. She was so impressed by the fact that we were talking about politics as a church. Almost all of us were miserable about the Coalition's return to office. We couldn't believe there would be three more years of John Howard and policies most of us felt angry about. A week before, most of us had gone to an anti-Howard rally and sang songs for peace.

But one couple felt we should be staying out of politics. We had the seeds of the split which happened eighteen months later in early 2006, when the Peace Tree people stopped meeting with us, an outcome most of us didn't want at all.

Jarrod McKenna, Nathan Hobby, Nicole Hobby at the final PAF meeting

Yet for the time being, the church stayed big, and I was convinced that it was time to plant a second church. A group of us started a second meeting with the same format, coming together for a combined meeting with the original group once a month. We never settled officially on a name, but called it 'SAF' - Shalom Anabaptist Fellowship or Southern Anabaptist Fellowship.

I had a naïve faith back then, a confidence that because PAF was built on the right foundations, because we were trying to do things the 'right' way, we could handle anything. One woman with a lot of problems managed to burn several people out, and cause conflicts about how to handle her. I thought it would only take love, prayer and compassion, but I was wrong; we weren't strong enough, we didn't have enough resources to handle her.

In the weeks leading up to our wedding, Nicole and I were driving out to the hills to run a discipleship course with this woman, as she hadn't fitted into our Bible study. We made no dents in her bad habits, self-destructive behaviour, or her beliefs. If anyone brings her name up these days, I still feel the chill of my own naivety. That woman represents my confidence in the gospel (as I understood it) running into a brick wall.

But what were we meant to do? She was a troubled person, lonely and needy and she lived close to where we met. Surely we had to try?

*

It was 2006 and things were going wrong. People were leaving, although Don Cameron and Marcia and Peter Hewitt joined. The golden days were well and truly over. At an emotional meeting, for some reason we decided the Peace Tree crew would no longer meet with us. We went back down to one group.

Nicole and I were just married, had moved too many times and were unsettled. We went to a house church conference which unsettled us further. The speakers were completely focused on house church as a way of multiplying churches quickly, a church planting strategy to reach more non-Christians. They made it sound so simple, talking about the 'Luke 11:2b virus', and placed no value on what we were already doing.

A well-known figure in Perth Christian circles gave Brad a prophecy for our church at that conference. He said the picture God gave him about our church was 'dead doves'. The picture disturbed us and was to sap our confidence in the months to come. Maybe he was right, maybe God was telling us we were dead doves? Maybe our problem was we didn't have the Holy Spirit?

The messages from the conference heightened tensions in our group and worsened our identity crisis. Maybe we were meant to be planting lots of churches? Surely we were meant to be seeing non-Christians come to faith?

I feel sad and angry looking back. The conference speakers simplified things way too much, and simplifying things can confuse people, make them feel they're missing out, they've got everything completely wrong. Sometimes there's too many voices and if you pay attention to them all, you'll just get confused.

But we soldiered on. I didn't think, at that time, that we could die. PAF was so important to me; I'd have done anything for it.

A lot of our attention was focused on preparing for the AAANZ Conference in January 2007. We worked together well, with Brad Schilling the principal organiser working with Nicole and me and the rest of PAF.

The conference was, in one sense, a showcase of our ideal of being Anabaptist church. We chose 'Living Anabaptism' as the theme, and we used the practices of the church found in John Yoder's *Body Politics* as the basis for the sessions. We wanted to encourage AAANZers to practice Anabaptism in their church context.

Many people came from the east for the conference, as well as a lot of Western Australians. It was a success and an encouragement. Most logically, it was the start of a revitalisation of PAF, of good things ahead. I don't think any of us suspected that PAF only had three months left.

There were unresolved tensions in the group about our attitude to new people. From my point of view, it came down to whether we encouraged newcomers to participate or whether we were worried about them taking over the group. I was all for encouraging. People on the other side of the debate worried that we risked losing our distinctiveness.

In February, the Schillings left. I felt a hole without them. Their hospitality had been a backbone of the church, encouraging so many people. Marina's wisdom and Brad's teaching had inspired and guided so many of us in our twenties, who looked to them as role models.

Around this time, Nicole and I moved to the western suburbs of Perth and were looking to plant a sister house church there, still shaken up by the Dales, by the need for church to be local, and the need to be missional. We now lived a long way from everyone else. Dave and Heather Prangnell, who had become very involved, were due to move to Indonesia any month. As it happened, we didn't plant a church and Dave and Heather didn't go to Indonesia for another year, but at the time it seemed we were moving in different directions. A new draining conflict was also raging. Most of us agreed it was time to finish.

We had a final thanksgiving meeting on April Fool's Day 2007. We invited everyone who had been a part of the church. All the Peace Tree people came, and Ross and Julie McKinnon; Julie was unwell then and died in 2008 from cancer. I was so glad to see everyone all together in the same place again. I wished we could go back to the old days, the glory days. But we couldn't of course.

PAF finished and I felt a sense of relief, because at times it had been a heavy burden, but I also felt a sadness which still hasn't lifted, because it's the time I most completely belonged to a church. It's the time I came closest to living Anabaptism.

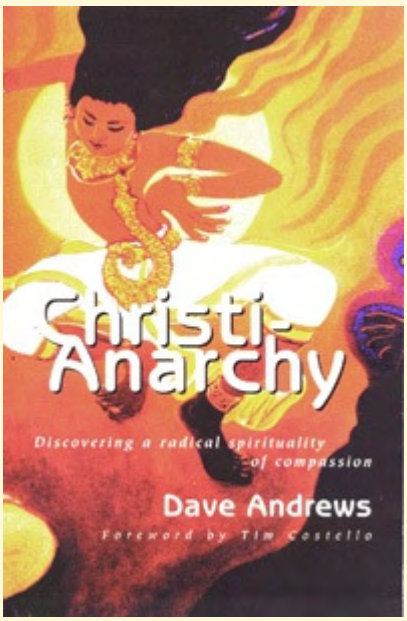
A Decade of Christi-Anarchy

A Reassessment of Dave Andrews' Manifesto

By Nathan Hobby

A few months ago, I was in the supermarket when I ran into the woman who had been my local National Party member of parliament when I was growing up. We spoke briefly about religion, and she mentioned that she was reading an excellent book by Dave Andrews called *Christi-Anarchy*. I was amazed; conservatives weren't meant to read books like that. It was an incident that confirmed my growing sense that I had been wrong through my early twenties to dismiss everyone on the conservative side of politics.

In contrast to the former National party politician who was a fan of the book, the first time I heard mention of *Christi-Anarchy* was in early 2000, when it was reviewed in a left wing newspaper my communist housemate had left on the kitchen table.



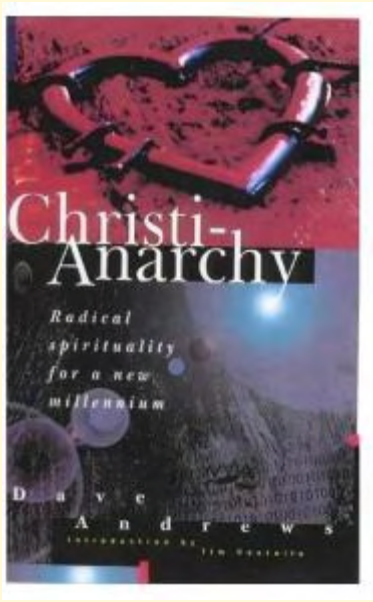
Published in 1999, *Christi-Anarchy* has now been with us for a bit more than ten years, right through the noughties. I tried to buy a copy for my library recently; the original edition is selling for $40-$90 from secondhand booksellers on the internet. (Fortunately, it has also been republished.) It's a book which has had a big impact on the radical Christian circle in Perth. Back in the middle of the decade when Peace Tree was forming and Perth Anabaptist Fellowship was flourishing, it was one of the most talked about books.

Christi-Anarchy is a wide-ranging manifesto, full of stories from both history and Dave's life, giving the reader an account of Dave's view of the world which can be summed up as 'Christi-Anarchy'.

It starts out with the personal story of Dave's expulsion from the evangelistic organisation YWAM ('Why? -

Wham!') and uses this as an example of the evil that Dave insists naturally follows from established religion. The chapters that follow flesh this out with stories of the atrocities committed in the name of Christ throughout history, right up to the present day with American evangelicals supporting the 'born-again' Guatemalan president who went on to commit genocide. Christians discount this history in various ways which Dave finds unconvincing. For him 'Christianity as a religion is not merely an excuse, but actually the reason that so many Christians act in an un-Christlike manner.' (p.61) He goes on to explain that 'once Christianity has become established as a religion, Christians have usually been totally unwilling to advocate for crucial anti-establishment causes like liberty, equality and democracy for all.' (p.61)

I largely agree, but would tend to frame the problem in terms of Constantianism – the compromise with the state and embrace of political influence and power – rather than its existence as a religion. A post-Constantinian church surely has a good chance of avoiding the evils of centuries of a church in power. (But then what about the YWAM example? It isn't Constantinian in any sense except its concern with results, massive impacts. But it would also, I'm certain, deny being 'religious'.)



This is why Dave's explanation of 'closed-set' versus 'centred-set' models of Christianity is important. Closed-set Christianity clearly defines who is 'in' and who is 'out' by a set of expected behaviours and beliefs. There is a clear boundary. In contrast, centred-set Christianity is defined by people moving toward its centre – Christ – and there are no boundaries.

> Conversion in Closed-Set Christianity means confessing 'Jesus Christ is Lord', repenting of a prescribed set of sins and, depending on the denomination involved, being baptized in water and/or the Holy Spirit. Conversion in Centred-Set Christi-Anarchy means turning toward Christ, whether we know him by that name or not, beginning to judge our own lives, for ourselves, in the light of his love, and beginning to trust his love to sustain us on the journey of personal growth and social change that he is calling us to. (p.84)

This analysis offers a diagnosis for centuries of evil and an alternative to it. But I can't follow Dave to where he goes here. Confessing 'Jesus as Lord' is essential to being his disciple. Confessing it is not enough in itself, but it is not optional. And baptism is important in marking our new life as part of the new humanity – that is, the church. It seems to be the church that is missing. The original Anabaptists insisted that the disciplined church (or to put it another way, the community of disciples) was an essential part of the message of the New Testament. It needs to hold certain things in common and have limits and boundaries. How it polices and decides those boundaries is an important question. And it does often lead to all the problems the book talks about. But I think that to be faithful to Jesus, we are stuck with trying to make it work – practicing, I would suggest, the anti-authoritarian, equalising disciplines John Howard Yoder talks about in *Body Politics*, like communal discernment and the giftedness of all believers.

Christi-Anarchy's final section is called 'The Way of Christ – The Way of Compassion' and it offers a series of reflections on the struggles of following the Way of Christ. Its form is quite different to the rest of the book, much of it lengthy italicized meditations calling us to walk with Jesus through parts of his life.

Christi-Anarchy offers hope to both disillusioned Christians and activist/green/left non-believers who are unimpressed by the church. It isn't prescriptive and doesn't finish with a clear sense of 'what next' for people who are convinced – but that's exactly the point. The way forward is going to be a messy journey of personal growth, without all the clear answers that establishment Christianity offers. This will be good for some readers; perhaps not for good for others. I see a lot of church drop-outs in radical Christian circles who end up without any worshipping and discipling community. I think of a friend who couldn't call himself a Christian any longer, but embraced Christi-Anarchism. I think he took the book as permission to do what he wanted – even if the book wasn't saying that. His faith became vaguer and vaguer and he drifted right away from even Christi-Anarchism. Not the book's fault, but I do wonder what it was he needed.

Any book which gets so many people talking about Jesus and radical discipleship is a welcome achievement. I congratulate Dave Andrews on a decade of *Christi-Anarchy* and believe it offers interesting proposals that we need to continue to think about and discuss as Anabaptists in Australia and New Zealand.

- *If you don't want to purchase a rare and expensive first edition of Christi-Anarchy, you can get hold of a reprint at www.lastfirst.net. We hope to bring you a review of Dave's new book on the trinity in the next OTR, a book Dave says explains his ecclesiology more clearly and needs to be read in tandem with Christi-Anarchy.*

Books of the Decade

What do you think of lists? Do you think they are arbitrary and rather silly, like my wife? Or do you love them, like me?

You can tell a lot about a decade from its books. I asked two of our Anabaptist bibliophiles—Doug Hynd and Mark Hurst—to list the ten books published between 2000 and 2009 they consider most important for Anabaptists. The intersections and divergences are interesting in themselves. Two books made it to both lists, Stuart Murray's Post Christendom and Lee Griffith's The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God. J. Denny Weaver and our own Chris Marshall had different books in both lists. The lists appear without comment on this page, but on the following pages you'll find a full explanation from both of our contributors.

- Editor

Doug Hynd

1. **The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God**
   Lee Griffith
2. **Post Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World**
   Stuart Murray
3. **Becoming Anabaptist**, 2nd edition
   J. Denny Weaver
4. **Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World**
   Lee C Camp
5. **An Angel directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire**
   Michael Northcott
6. **Following in the footsteps of Christ: the Anabaptist Tradition**
   Arnold Snyder
7. **Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity**
   Walter Klaassen & William Klassen
8. **Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy**
   Donald B Krabill, Steven M & David L Weaver-Zercher
9. **John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions**
   Mark Thiessen Nation
10. **Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human rights in the Biblical Tradition**
    Chris Marshall

Mark Hurst

- **Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment**
  Christopher D Marshall
- **The Nonviolent Atonement**,
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- **The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace**
  John Paul Lederach
  A Culture of Peace: God's Vision for the Church
  Alan and Eleanor Kreider and Pau
- **Dissident Discipleship – A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbour**
  David Augsburger
- **Recovering the Scandal of the Cross / Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement**
  ed. Mark D. Baker

Doug Hynd's books of the decade

Responding to Nathan Hobby's request for a personal list of ten books of importance for Anabaptist Christians published during the first decade of this millennium was always going to be a challenge. I have compiled my list with reference to the following criteria:

- They are books that have had an influence on me and that I have mostly gone back and reread.
- They are books that were, with a couple of exceptions, written for thinking Christians rather than directly or solely for an academic audience.

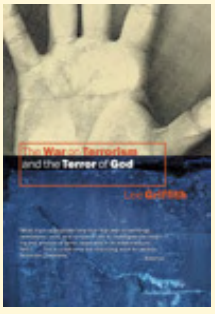
The list that has emerged after some scrambling around my bookshelves reflects my engagement with the Anabaptist tradition over the past decade rather than an attempt to take a global view from the great height of academic detachment.

What made my task of selection really difficult is that throughout this past decade I was seriously engaging in depth for the first time with Anabaptist history and theology. As I went back and checked publication dates on quite a few books that I was planning to list I realised that I couldn't include them because while I had only read them during the past decade they had actually been published a good deal earlier.

The other difficulty in deciding on what books I would include arose from the fact that previously unpublished material by John Howard Yoder continues to roll off the presses a decade after his death, I made an arbitrary decision to leave recently published collections of material by Yoder for another occasion.

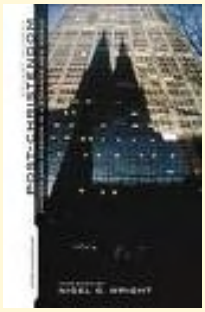
A couple of things occurred to me in reviewing the list:

- Publication of material on the Anabaptist tradition and related issues is certainly not confined to Mennonite publishers and are in fact a minority. Anglicans, Reformed and secular publishers all get a guernsey.
- The Anabaptist tradition is now strongly influencing theologians across a range of denominations with the work of John Howard Yoder the most obvious common factor when you explore where the Anabaptist influence has come from.



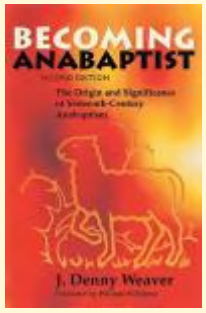
1. **The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God**
Lee Griffith (Eerdmans, 2004)

This is a stunning piece of theology, a reading of scripture set against the contemporary emergence of the issue of terrorism and informed by reflection on history. This is a must read for anyone trying to articulate and live a theology of peace. The text of the book was completed before 11 September 2001.



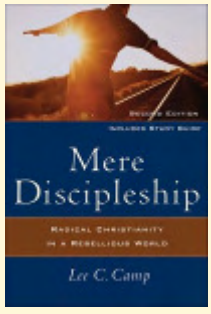
2. **Post Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World**
Stuart Murray (Paternoster, 2004)

An accessible account of what Christendom was, how it impacted on the church and what church and mission might look like now we are in a time after Christendom. As relevant for Christians in Australia as it is for Christians in the United Kingdom to whom it was initially directed.



3. **Becoming Anabaptist**, 2nd edition
J. Denny Weaver (Herald Press, 2005)

This is an account that argues in terms of its historical origins and theological focus why it is that Anabaptism is best understood as a movement in its own right, not simply a variant of Protestantism. The second edition stands out on its own as it takes into developments in scholarship since the first edition was published in 1987.

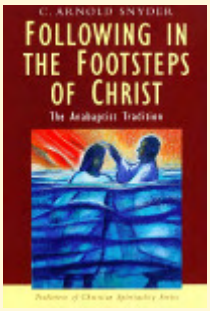


4. **Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World**
Lee C Camp (Brazos Press, 2003)

A wonderful account of Christian discipleship that reframes it firmly within an Anabaptist account of what it is to follow Jesus and starkly in contrast to consumer spirituality. It is now available in a second edition.

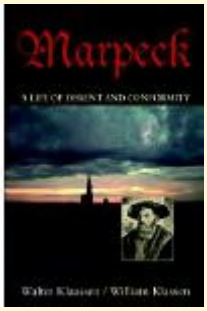
5. **An Angel directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire**
Michael Northcott (I & B Taurus, 2004)

This is a passionately written account of the religious underpinnings of American neo-conservatism contrasted with the peaceful vision underpinning the politics of Jesus.

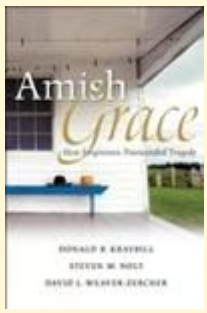


6. **Following in the footsteps of Christ: the Anabaptist Tradition**
Arnold Snyder (Darton, Longman, Todd, 2004)

This volume in the Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series opens up the Anabaptist tradition from the perspective of the spiritual understanding and practice that undergirded the visible Anabaptist witness. Draws heavily on the testimonies, songs and writings of the early Anabaptists.

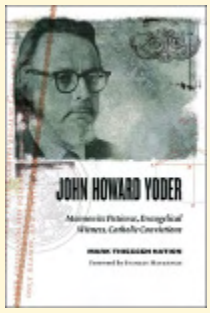


7. **Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity**
Walter Klaassen & William Klassen
(Herald Press, 2008)
The first comprehensive account of the life, times and theology of Pilgram Marpeck, that brings to life one of the most complex and interesting figures in 16th century south German Anabaptism.



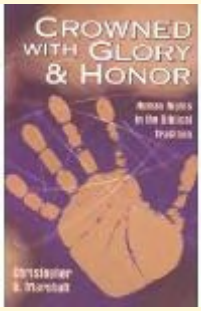
8. Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy
Donald B Krabill, Steven M & David L Weaver-Zercher (Jossey-Bass, 2007)

Anabaptist witness to the world community broke through with the story of the response of forgiveness by the Amish following the shooting of 10 school girls at Nickel Mine in Pennsylvania in October 2006. This book by Mennonite scholars explores the practices and habits that underlay the forgiveness and grace displayed by the community.



9. John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions
Mark Thiessen Nation (Eerdmans, 2006)

A comprehensive and accessible survey of Yoder's life and theology that makes clear the ecumenical importance of what he wrote and the broad scope of his thinking.

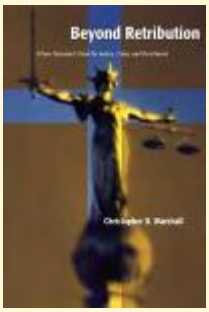


10. Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human rights in the Biblical Tradition
Chris Marshall (Pandora Press, 2001)

Chris Marshall does a great job in making clear the depth and range of connections between the Biblical traditions and the language of human rights. This is simply the most accessible introduction to this issue that is currently available.

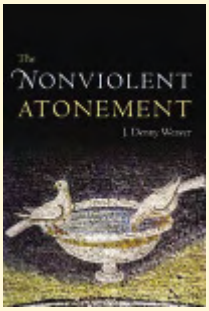
Mark Hurst's Books of the Decade

The task assigned by Nathan to pick the "Top 10 books of the 2000's" is of course an impossible task. I went back over the books we reviewed in *On The Road* during the past decade and ended up with a list of twenty key books from the 2000's. The following ten books are my final choices. They are each worth another look. They cover key topics of the first decade of the 21st century like terrorism, empire, restorative justice, post-Christendom, and the atonement.



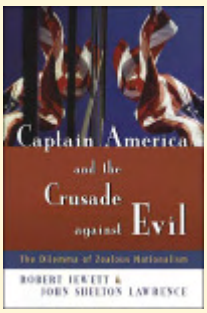
Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment
Christopher D Marshall (Eerdmans, 2001)

In bringing together a detailed examination of what the New Testament has to say about crime and punishment along with a substantial engagement with the philosophical debate on crime and punishment, Chris has demonstrated how biblical scholarship can be of service and provide a challenge to both the Christian and the wider community. A classic. (OTR 14)



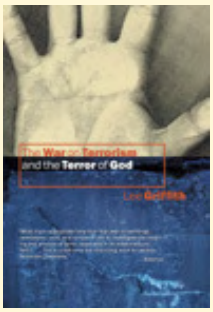
The Nonviolent Atonement,
J. Denny Weaver (Eerdmans, 2001)

The major problem Weaver sees in classical atonement theories is that they start with violence. Weaver's atonement model, called narrative Christus Victor, has as its working assumption "the rejection of violence" – "atonement from a nonviolent perspective." Weaver builds on the work of John Howard Yoder and calls his book "a theological parallel to *Politics of Jesus*." While I do not agree with everything Weaver says, he raises good questions. (OTR 16)

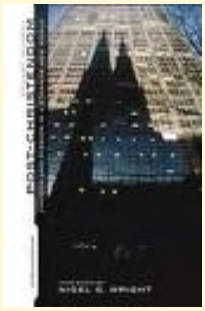


Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism
Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence (Eerdmans, 2003)

This almost 400-page tome is not light reading but if you want to understand American civil religion, this is a good place to start. The authors use the September 11 attacks on the United States as a backdrop for examining "the historical development of America's split personality, paying special attention to the spirit of zealous warfare that has so often seized the upper hand in policy and public opinion." The authors' "analysis seeks to explain why America...seems so proudly resolute about repeating the errors of the Cold War." (OTR20)

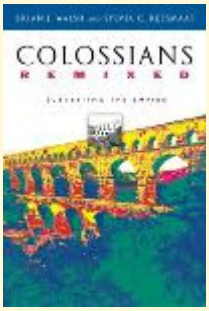


The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God
Lee Griffith (Eerdmans, 2004)
The book was already in production when the events of 11 September took place. Griffith argues for a complete rejection of violence in all of its forms. "Once one justifies the use of violence, one should not be surprised to find that the line between just warrior and terrorist can be very fine indeed – fine to the point of subjectivity, fine to the point of apparition." (OTR 18)



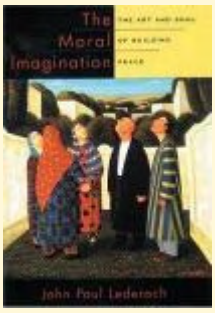
Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World
Stuart Murray (Paternoster, 2004)

Drawing on insights from the early Christians, dissident movements and the world church, this book analyses the Christendom era and its troublesome legacy, challenges conventional ways of thinking, offers resources for Christians who will dare to imagine new ways of following Jesus on the margins, and telling his story in a world they can no longer control. The complete Post-Christendom series is good. (OTR 23)



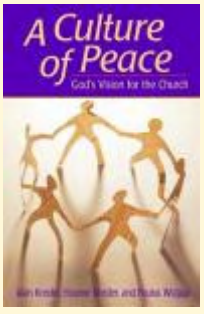
Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire
Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmat (InterVarsity Press, 2004)

Brian Walsh has teamed up his wife Sylvia Keesmat to provide a challenging and imaginative re-reading of Paul's epistle to the Colossians in the light of contemporary culture and politics. Globalisation, Postmodernity and living in an age of empire are the key themes that are brought into dialogue with the poetry and practice of an epistle written to first century Christians living in the shadow of the Roman empire. (OTR 28)



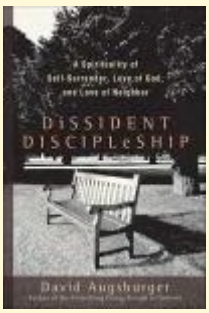
The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace
John Paul Lederach
(Oxford University Press, 2005)

Lederach suggests a fresh look at the essence of transforming violent conflict. Though his background is sociology, Lederach offers a wide variety of insights to a spectrum of disciplines from anthropology to missiology. The moral imagination, he proposes in the book, "develops a capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye." (OTR 29)



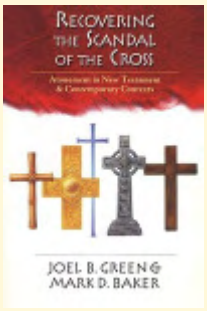
A Culture of Peace: God's Vision for the Church
Alan and Eleanor Kreider and Paulus Widjaja (Good Books, 2005)

This book challenges the church to be a culture of peace. Kreider, Kreider and Widjaja first do a mini-systematic theology of how the Biblical record is one calling God's people to be a culture of peace. They then go on to test this culture in various settings such as the church itself, the workplace and within the social settings where we live. They look at what it means to be a culture of peace in wartime and how this affects our evangelism. (OTR 30)

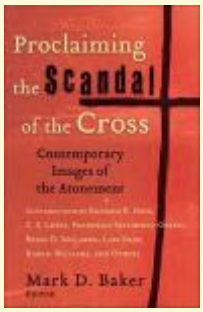


Dissident Discipleship – A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbour,
David Augsburger
(Brazos Press, 2006)

What Augsburger does in this book is take on the popular topic of "spirituality" and embody it in Anabaptist discipleship. William Willimon says, "If you thought 'spirituality' was mostly fluff and feathers, get this book. Building upon his cruciform Anabaptist tradition, David Augsburger gives us a substantial, faithful look at lives formed by Christ." (OTR 31)



Recovering the Scandal of the Cross
ed. Mark D. Baker
(InterVarsity Press, 2000)
Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement
ed. Mark D. Baker
(Baker Academic, 2006)



The major question Baker is trying to answer in these two books (sorry, I needed to include both) is "How does the cross and resurrection provide salvation... 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?" (OTR 33)

I am

By Moriah Hurst

Moriah Hurst (right) with the Irene's Place interns.

On 12 November, Moriah Hurst, who runs Irene's Place in Canberra, took part in a forum on Christianity and War. It was one of the quarterly Becoft Forums set up by the MIAT foundation. There were three other people on the panel- an army chaplain, a former soldier who is now a minister, and a woman who works for the Global Peace Index. There were about two hundred people in the audience.

In my work with young adults I often use an exercise called "I am" poster. I get each person to write down "I am" statements about themselves. To start off today I wanted to give you a few "I am" statements about me.

"I am" – a child of God, a pacifist, an Anabaptist/ Baptist/Mennonite, a child of my tradition, a survivor of violence, a follower of Christ, a young adult working with youth and young adults, an American who grew up Aussie, and a person who is still learning.

I was born into class, education, nationality, language, and skin colour that gave me great privilege – I believe that to those that much is given, much will be asked.

My tradition

I was raised in the Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition. During the Reformation the Anabaptist thought that the Reformers did not go far enough. They believed that they should be able to interpret the biblical text for themselves in community and not be told what the Bible said by priests. They believed in believer's baptism, in an adult making this commitment to faith and a clear separation of church and state. They also believed that they could not take up the sword and fight because it contradicted the call of Christ. Because of these beliefs they were largely martyred. However, the tradition did manage to live on and is marked by the continuing commitment to peace and non violence as well as community discernment and a simple lifestyle.

My family

I am the child of parents who read the gospels and felt that God was calling them toward a peaceful way of life and faith. Both of my grandfathers fought in WWII and many of my cousins have or are serving in the American armed forces. So being people of peace had to be a conscious choice. This means that I grew up knowing that I needed to live out my non-violent views and also be articulate about what I believed and why.

I have wrestled long and hard with the idea of military involvement. Some of my cousins have killed people in their time in the armed service, so I can't just demonize those "bad soldiers"; they are part of my family. I cannot set myself up as over and against the other, I have to learn to know them and their motivations. But I find what the military does and teaches destructive, dehumanizing and counter to my faith.

I realise that I have these views because my parents and my tradition are people of peace. My personal

narrative has been flooded with stories of peace but I would rather tell these stories than add to the voices of the world that say the biggest guns, the most violence and the cleverest cunning wins.

My faith

I am a Child of God and a follower of Jesus Christ. My commitment to peace is deeply grounded in my faith and my relationship with God, through Jesus. Jesus is my lens for how I read the Bible and look at life and faith.
When Jesus said "Love your enemies" he probably meant don't kill them.
I see every person as a child of God and thus wonder, "how dare we kill a child of God?"
As the people of God, I believe that we are not only called to not go to war, but to be active peace makers. When I look to the New Testament and the life of Jesus I see a Jesus who was not violent. Yes, Jesus got angry but he did not repay in like kind. When violence was done to Jesus he did not respond in violence, even to the point of death. He stopped violence by absorbing it and living out an alternative to retaliation.
I follow a Jesus who had power in weakness. Who stood up to the political and religious powers of his day and spoke truth. A Jesus who dodged stoning a woman by drawing on the ground, and a Jesus who valued the least of these, but who was bold and compassionate at the same time.
A Jesus who said things like "Blessed are the peacemakers", "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you".
I believe that as Christians we are called to be in the world but not of it – actively living something that is countercultural.
Jesus does not make this life sound easy, in fact he calls us to take up our cross and follow him.
I believe that the People of God are not defined by borders and nationalistic boundaries. We are the People of God bound together in Christ's body through faith. I believe we are called to value difference and see the other as a brothers or sisters in Christ.

My Pacifism

So, I am a pacifist or I try to hold to the ideas and actions of pacifism in my life.
I know that I am compliant to/in violence. But I am not willing to let others be violent for me. I don't think it is alright for me to say I am non-violent and then call in the police or the army to do violence in my name. I must actively work for peace.
Me being a pacifist does not mean that I am passive, I can't sit by, but neither can I make the war makers into my enemy – they are people too and children of God, beloved to our creator, just as I am.
A majority of people would say that they are for peace but our budgets for war making say something different – imagine training for peace with the commitment and money that we train for war!

This leads me to my work

I am a young adult who works with youth and young adults. I believe that discipleship and peacemaking must be taught and lived out. I live and work with a group of young women who have committed a year of their lives to serve. Together we look at what it means to live out our faith from day to day, volunteering time in the community and working at initiatives of peacemaking. We are trying to live simply and address conflict in constructive ways. The name 'Irene's Place' comes from the Greek word for peace. We are trying to find what an Australian expression of peace is here in Canberra, making a place for peace.
Some of my work is struggling with these "what if" statements:
What if we trained our children to approach the other with curiosity and openness instead of suspicion and fear? What if we worked toward cooperation and the good of all instead of bowing to the myth of redemptive violence and encouraging children to play out war, putting guns in their hands at younger and younger ages and telling them that it is fun and a game to point a gun at someone and pull a trigger?

We need to measure success with the good of all in mind and not just try to promote the individual to the detriment of the community.

Closing

My faith - my relationship with God in the example of Jesus and with the guidance and wisdom of God' Holy Spirit - leads me toward peace. It is a complicated, active, involved peace. It is a peace that means more than an absence of war but that is grounded in God's great shalom and wholeness. My faith is more than a relationship between me and God, it is also between me and other people and me and all of creation; my wholeness and shalom in God is tied to their wholeness.
I am a pacifist but I also confess that I am a human and flawed and in desperate need of God's grace and mercy. Nowhere in my faith do I see a call to violence, let alone war. What I do see is a strong call to the opposite, to be a people of peace actively following the Prince of Peace.

New Monasticism

Transitional and Transfigurational Communities

By Gordon Preece

First published in Arena Magazine Aug-Sept 2009—visit www.arena.org.au. Gordon also gave a short version of this essay as a paper to the AAANZ tele-conference on 1 November 2009.

The quiet practice of monasticism has become surprisingly loud of late. First came the unexpected success of Philip Groning's meditative documentary *Into Great Silence* about a silent order of Carthusian monks in the French Alps. You might ask what does this have to say today. For some, plenty. If the white noise of all-consuming contemporary capitalism exercises a disciplining role over our desires, an equally strong discipline may be needed to prise us out of its clutches. Even total silence.

Second was last year's *Compass* reality TV series on Australians experiencing the attractions and deprivations of a bite-sized spell in a monastery. This was more a smorgasbord of consumerist, picking-and-choosing or channel-surfing spirituality — transcendence to go, light on social liberation: a utilitarian means to an end of ecstatic, Maslowian peak experience.

But between these two types of monastic experience could there be a more accessible form of spiritual solidarity that could help re-order and discipline our disordered desires, desires that might become demands?

Where might a disciplined communal shaping of desire fit in the light of recent Arena editorial musings on 'the emerging crisis of existence' (*Arena Magazine* no. 100), the sense of being ontologically out-of-orbit in Western techno-capitalist culture, a Weberian 'info-cage' reducing human being to byte size? This is beyond any obsession with the GFC or even climate change, where everything is 'framed by the notion of sustainability — the maintenance of basically normal expectations but by different means'. One is reminded of Canadian Christian activist and musician Bruce Cockburn's, 'The trouble with normal is it always gets worse'.

Something beyond normal is needed. Somewhere between the old, ultra-disciplined monasticism and this spiritual seeking and dabbling lies New Monasticism, a growing movement in some younger, emergent churches, disillusioned with the cultural and economic captivity of much church life. Even some prominent Protestant theologians have affirmed the need for New Monasticism. During his experiment with an underground monastic seminary community at Finkelwalde, Kevin Rudd's pin-up theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer stressed monasticism offered hope for a self-dispossessing, post-Constantinian post-war church. In a prophetic letter to his brother Karl-Friedrich on 14 January 1935, he wrote:

> The restoration of the Church must surely come from a new kind of monasticism, which will have only one thing in common with the old, a life lived without compromise according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Jesus. I believe the time has come to gather people together for this.

Rather than a reliance on inimitable individual heroism and martyrdom, which lets us off the hook, this promises an age-old form of life capable of resisting the tyrannies of many times, including our time. George McLeod developed the Iona Community in Scotland around the same time, drawing on Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, about Finkelwalde. A generation later even 'evangelical Pope' John Stott called for a 're-monking' of the church. In this decade Eugene Petersen called on Protestant leaders to replace their 'ego lust to be god' with 'an open monastery', concluding: 'What is critical is an imagination large enough to contain all

of life, all worship and work in prayer set in a structure adequate to the actual conditions in which it is lived out' (compare this to 'Reflections on the Current Condition' in *Arena Magazine* no. 100).

What Petersen calls 'an open monastery' I call Monday Monasticism in an attempt to describe a disciplined and discerning life of work and worship, beyond sacred–secular separations, for lay professionals whose vows are to ordinary and alternative vocations and an appreciation of alterity. The monasteries were the ethical incubators of the modern professions — those who profess or vow, like clergy, lawyers and doctors — but are capable of broadening to the proletariat. All are in danger of becoming ciphers for 'the customer knows best' or, more euphemistically, 'client' or blatantly 'consumer' autonomy in reaction to the paternalistic professionalism of the past — autonomy as antidote to the loss of a broad, non-coercive moral consensus, whose tissue of trust is torn. Professionals themselves are degenerating into technicians, cogs in the wheel of the techno-market complex.

'Monasticism represents an arsenal of ascetic and spiritual practices for settled communal life, or solitude, or the life of wandering, begging mendicants.'

Most new monastics cite former Marxist, then Aristotelian, now Catholic, Alasdair MacIntyre in his seminal *After Virtue*, which stresses the need for a renewal of monasticism as one form of a desperately needed revivifying of the virtues beyond the masculine and military virility of Homer and his modern descendants:

> If my account of our moral condition is correct … What matters now is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages that are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues were able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers, they have already been among us for some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for Godot, but for another — doubtless very different — St Benedict.

Cardinal Ratzinger's choice of namesake, Benedict XVI, and his recent critique of global neo-liberalism in the name of Catholicism's rich social tradition and quest to re-establish the roots of an amnesiac Europe in *Without Roots*, also owes something to Benedictine and other monasticism, which he sees 'as a pre-political and supra-political force ... the harbinger of ever welcome and necessary rebirths of culture and civilization'. MacIntyre's *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* finds potential for the rebirth of the universities in a renewal of the disputation method of the monastically founded medieval universities like Paris which built peaceful, rational engagement with the best alternative opinions, including Islam, in the Dominican Aquinas' case.

Before proceeding further, we might consider the definition of monasticism, from *monarchos*, meaning 'alone'. Originally referring to hermits, it more broadly referred to the withdrawal, in the late third and early fourth centuries AD, of thousands of lay Christians from the increasingly nominal, clerical, state-co-opted Constantinian church. It also kept alive the martyr and pacifist spirit of the pre-Constantinian church through the (often extreme) ascetic discipline of desire. Monasticism represents an arsenal of ascetic and spiritual practices for settled communal life, or solitude, or the life of wandering, begging mendicants. Some later adapted monastic practices to ordinary life in the world: family, common meals and work, community with the poor. It is the latter life most New Monastics lead, often, like their predecessors, in the abandoned places of Empire.

New Monasticism operates in the areas where Geoff Sharp argues ('To Market, To Market', *Arena Magazine* no. 100) the market's technologically sustained 'surge of productivity' has undermined or colonised the more personal processes of pre-ethical formation in the informal mores of 'direct presence' found in families, friendships and communities, but less so yet in the more institutionalised arenas of intellectual formation. Sharp is right that nurturing and reforming these social forms within which people build cultures of local and intellectual sustainability is a key condition of ethical renewal.

For Sharp 'a grassroots and intellectual bridging … or transitional process supportive of a different vision is gradually emerging which doesn't fit current political arrangements'. Similarly, in **'**Good News for a Planet in Trouble' (*Arena Magazine* no. 95), Ian Barns outlines several transition or devolution scenarios to an ecologically sustainable post-industrial society and more local economy. He and Nonie Sharp ('Listening to Voices', *Arena Magazine* no. 100) commend Rob Hopkins' UK 'transition town' movement aimed at restoring 'local resilience', reminiscent of Schumacher's Small is Beautiful Movement of the seventies and eighties. As in James Kunstler's darker scenario of de-industrialising collapse in *The Long Emergency*, small-scale communal food provision is critical.

Although an unbeliever, Kunstler sees a possible role for religion in sustaining human community in the long emergency. His favoured model is 'the Amish community, which has stubbornly resisted the blandishments of high-tech through the entire oil-drunk extravaganza of the twentieth century'. However, despite the likely desperate circumstances, he cannot see its strict communal disciplines attracting many away from the hyper-individualistic and consumerist evangelical and Pentecostal churches. These are unlikely to sustain 'the kind of cooperative behaviour required to restore agricultural communities', though some new monastic communities may, in a small way, with their commitment to place, slow food, common meals and common work.

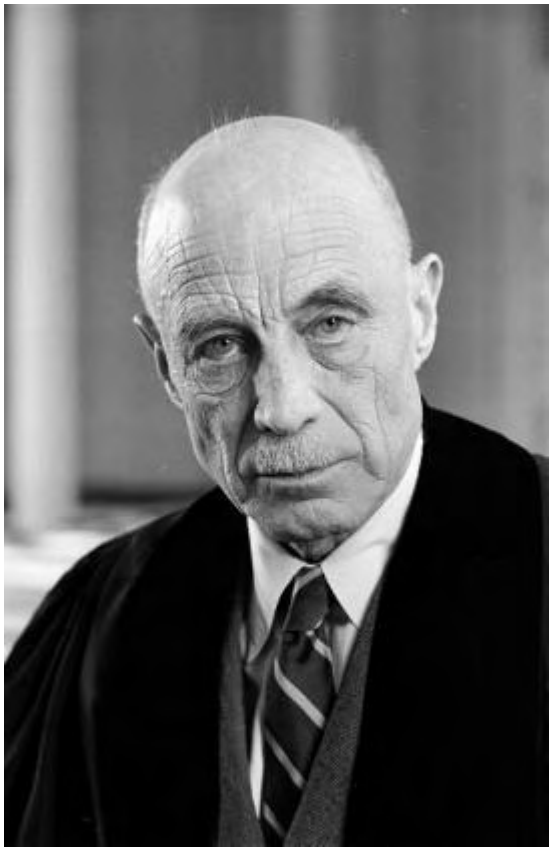
Nonie Sharp looks to tenacious 'groups of like-minded souls' whose 'keynote is resilience — the ability … to work together over time in the face of shocks from the wider world'. And I might add, their own failures and fractured relationships, as in the Greenham Common women (see Angela West's *Deadly Innocence*) and numerous Christian activist communities. For Sharp new mindsets need time 'to put down roots' and nurture resilience. This is like what the Benedictines called the 'vow of stability', to stay put in one place doing the hard, slow work of building community with humanity and creation. Compare the Jewish–Marxist–Catholic Simone Weil's *Our Need for Roots*, at another crisis moment, the French capitulation to the Nazis, where she argued that French Enlightenment values capitulated quickly because they had no transcendent and traditional roots sufficient to sustain communal solidarity. However, the once persecuted Protestant Huegenot community of Le Chambon did, smuggling Jews out at great risk.

Another in search of alternative communal models not swamped in the wake of capitalism is Daniel Bell, a member of the Radical Orthodox and Christian Socialist group founded by John Milbank and his seminal *Theology and Social Theory*. Bell's critique of the market as master-narrative draws on Deleuze's view of the state serving Capitalism's 'desiring machine'. His theological therapy for humanising this high-revving machine highlights Cistercian monasticism as a 'counter-ensemble' of Christian technologies of desire … As an ensemble of knowledges, systems of judgment, persons, institutions, and practices, Christianity governs desire; through a host of technologies such as liturgy, catechesis, orders, and discipleship, Christianity exerts an ontological influence on humanity'. This 'totalising' Christianity can beat Capitalism on its own ground, through a form of 'socialism by grace' (*Liberation Theology*) that is, voluntary, non-coercive, yet disciplined communities of goods.

Bell is right about monasticism at its best, but unfortunately his creative restoration of the Cistercians, like the medievalism of his Radical Orthodox compatriots, can be nostalgic and uncritical. The larger, wealthier Cistercians practised a form of fierce competitive capitalism analogous to our late modern variety. Like all penultimate human institutions, monasticism, new or old, must be constantly reforming. Fortunately, Catholics have been able to generate new transitional, monastic movements like the medieval mendicants of St Francis of Assisi (and the nuns of St Clare).

Derek Woodard-Lehman, in his 'On the Christological Transfiguration of Culture: Toward a Mendicant Ethic' (*Studies in Christian Ethics* vol. 21,

no. 3, 2008) prefers a more mobile mendicant monasticism and the notion of transfiguring, from Christ's momentary transfiguration (Mark 9:1–9). With this he challenges H. Richard Niebuhr's 'Christ Transforming Culture' model of the church's relationship to society. Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (1951) developed near canonical status in mainstream Protestantism from the time of the Marshall Plan and baby boom till now, assigning monasticism to his Christ Against Culture model.



H. Richard Niebuhr

Woodard-Lehman sees an 'abiding tension between critical and constructive relations with culture permeating Niebuhr's thought', expressed in the interrelated tensions of 'movement and institution, withdrawal and identification, accommodation and transformation'. He unearths surprising monastic alternatives in Niebuhr's more despairing 1935 book *Christ Against Culture* and 'Back to Benedict?'(*Christian Century* no. 42, 1925) written in the midst of and just before a global financial crisis respectively. For Niebuhr, 'In a time when a man cannot own a square foot of property or accept a salary without coming dangerously close to compromise with the whole evil and selfish system which issues in class and race exploitation and murder, the monastic ideal of poverty is not an unreasonable answer to the moral problem of poverty'.

Like MacIntyre and Benedict XVI, Niebuhr judges his historical moment in 1925 and 1935, his emerging GFC, to demand something like Benedict's monastic protest movement against the institutional church's co-option. 'The proximity and permeability required by the Christian movement's attempt to reorder the world [of business, industry and nationalism] has produced compromise and complicity rather than conversion'.

Yet after World War II, Niebuhr challenges the 'potential ascetic' or monastic not to make the emergency moment of monasticism or Christ against Culture into a permanent one. Their social reforms are unintended, and mediated through socially transformationist believers. *Christ Against Culture* monastic protest movements are necessary for cultural emergencies like the Dark Ages, Depression or GFC, but not for normal times, where there is no need for standing protests. It all depends on whether, like Kunstler, we think we are in a Long Emergency, a transitional, or transfigural, rather than transformative time.

Niebuhr already recognised how the transformationists are all too often themselves transformed by capitalist culture, and how Benedictine and Dominican monks, not to mention numerous orders of nuns, made major educational, economic and technological contributions to society (see R. Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 2005, ch. 2). In *Christ and Culture* he largely misses the wider significance of monastic conscientious objection or voluntary religious 'poverty', and what Bonhoeffer called the contagious power of example, and particularly communal experiments.

For Woodard-Lehman, *Christ and Culture*'s transformative type requires the wandering mendicant monastic to not collapse into culture, particularly capitalist, technologist, surveillance, militarist culture, as highlighted by Ellul, Foucault and co. 'A mendicant cultural ethic combines within itself both withdrawal and identification.' This more accurately reflects Niebuhr's broader insistence on Christianity as a movement, rather than an institution.

A mendicant cultural ethic also has advantages in late modernity over the dominating powers' tendency 'to sublimate any and all critical and revolutionary energy' in order to maintain the status quo. 'In such circumstances identification is almost inevitably sublimated into [idolatrous] legitimization, with respect to economy, politics, and violence.' Thus Woodard-Lehman argues that 'our heavy foot must be on the ascetic side of things; transformation must be construed *within*

withdrawal'. Bonhoeffer's and the new monastics' advocacy of post-Constantinian 'poverty' and 'dispossession' not being tied financially or ideologically to the state's apron strings and armour fits this emphasis. (Kevin Rudd must be finding it almost impossible to accommodate his mentor's monastic side in his current position.)

St Francis of Assisi (Anthony Van Dyck)

To Woodard-Lehman, a 'mendicant cultural ethic' enables cultural distance while maintaining presence. 'As such its engagement and identification can never be permanent, final or unambiguous; they are always provisional, situational, and equivocal. Stated within the typology of *Christ and Culture*, a mendicant cultural ethic would be a Christ *transfigures* culture type … Transfiguration, as opposed to transformation, is momentary and episodic; although it has lasting consequences, it is not, itself, necessarily enduring'. This fits well with the quest for transitional communities noted in *Arena Magazine* no. 100; while not necessarily Christian, some may be.

Amongst these ascetic communities arrayed against the dominant powers, Woodard-Lehman commends in the US context 'the people and practices of the Catholic Worker, L'Arche, the SNCC Freedom Houses, the Christian Community Development Association, and the New Sanctuary Movement [which] display such an ethic concretely'. In Australia I would add Melbourne's Urban Neighbours of Hope, Urban Seed, where Tim Costello was director, and the Community of the Transfiguration, among others. Even if like many New Monastics they are more settled than mendicants, they settle in the abandoned places of Empire, and the ruins of Christendom, and even if they work normal jobs, they orient their professions toward the poor, peace and a sense of place. Philip Adams has admitted he feels closer to many nuns in their protests for causes he shares than some of his atheist friends.

With old and new monks and nuns like these, Woodard-Lehman notes, 'Perhaps Niebuhr might join MacIntyre in once again calling for a new Benedict; or perhaps more fittingly, a new Francis'. In a seminal article in *Science* (no. 155) Lynn White Jr blames the Western ecological crisis on Christianity, though he still regards St Francis the patron saint of ecology. We certainly need movements combining the ascetic discipline and ecological eros of the Franciscans. No wonder the ecstatic conclusion of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* co-opts Francis from the church militant to their communism militant.

There is an ancient legend that might serve to illuminate the future life of communist militancy: that of St. Francis of Assisi. Consider his work. To denounce the poverty of the multitude he adopted that common condition and discovered there the ontological power of a new society. The communist militant does the same, identifying in the common condition of the multitude its enormous wealth. Francis in opposition to nascent capitalism refused every instrumental discipline, and in opposition to the mortification of the flesh (in poverty and in the constituted order) he posed a joyous life, including all of being and nature, the animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the field, the poor and exploited humans, together against the will of power and corruption. Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves in Francis' situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being. This is a revolution that no power will control — biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist.

The Plank In Australia's Eye

By Jarrod McKenna

First published on God's Politics blog (blog.sojo.net) 11/9/09.

"F%*# OFF! WE'RE FULL!" read the bumper sticker I saw this morning, written within the outline of the Australian continent. The bumper sticker felt twice as offensive when I heard that another boat of people fleeing horrific circumstance had sunk off the Australian coast. This is the side of Australia you won't see advertised in our tourism campaigns.

Who wants to mess with the world's image of the sun-kissed, fun-loving, larrikin nation Down Under? I believe God does. Biblically our redemption is not found in hiding our shame but in letting the Spirit transform it. As Philip Berrigan would say, "The poor tell us who we are. The prophets tell us who we can be. So we hide the poor and kill the prophets." One of Australia's greatest shames is the way we imprison, ignore, silence, and hide refugees who tell us who we are, and who we can be.

Australia must face what Dr. Cornell West would call 'the night side' of our national identity. Tied up in this 'night-side of Aussie pride' is the irrational xenophobia that makes it not just possible, but *popular* for both sides of politics to use the plight of refugees as a political football. Tragically, how asylum seekers have been treated by Australia reads as a case study of anthropologist Rene Girard's theory of scapegoating as the glue of society. Power politics in this country are being held together by the hatred of this most defenceless other.

A couple of years back while working with Aboriginal activist Uncle Kevin Buzzcott, he said to me, "When are you white fellas going to realize that you are all 'boatpeople'? If you are not going to let them [refugees] in, us black fellas should send you all home!"

Maybe deep in the white Australian psyche is the fear that just as the European colonisers stole the land from the indigenous peoples, so we might have the land stolen from us. Maybe what Uncle Kevin Buzzcott is pointing us to is the reality that what we fear is not 'the other' but a projection of own worst selves. This would explain the both blatant and veiled history of legislated racism such as the White Australia Policy and more recently, the supposedly overhauled Pacific Solution. We Australians can be very quick to point out the racist histories of South Africa and the United States without removing the plank in our own eye.

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas reminds us that "the other" is not an object for us to control but a subject of the Holy One for us to encounter that will inevitably leave us different. In welcoming the stranger we cannot be left the same. Or to put it differently, the Christian vocation to hospitality is inherently transformational.

This has been my own story. In small and humble ways, our church community have sought to open our homes to 'the strangers in the land.' In a country that has sanctioned a policy of exclusion we have sought to let God's grace form us into a people that embody a kingdom embrace. The Holy Spirit has opened the scriptures to us in ways we never expected! The stories we read and sing every Christmas of the young refugee family fleeing to a new land nursing Emanuel ('God with us') have become ours in ways that have wounded our comfortable lives with the wonder of our transformation being found in the liberation of others. Sharing communion with our friends who have shared our home, we have not just received Christ in the bread and fruit of the vine; we have received Christ in them. In visiting our imprisoned friends whose only 'crime' is fleeing torture and war-torn countries we have encountered what Quakers have traditionally called 'the visitation of the Presence'.

One of my favourite images of our church community is a photo I took outside Baxter Detention Centre while surrounded by riot cops. As the powers-that-be defended the 'night-side' Australia seeks to hide, there the church was found crying out in worship at these gates of hell, to the God who is about bringing heaven to earth. That night as we cried out in worship we heard from behind the barbed wire refugees respond, 'Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!'

But really it's the refugees we should be thanking. Thanking them for their courage, their resilience, their faith, their prophetic challenge to our xenophobia. It is encounters with 'the other' that makes it possible to dissolve our xenophobia. Our rejection of the Lord's commandment to welcome the stranger is the rejection of our encounter with 'the other' that would transform us into a more compassionate people. And there is a generation of young Christians determined that when people look back on this period in Australian history they will see the church was not silent to the cries of the most vulnerable.

The Holy Spirit is calling God's people in Australia to open our hearts, and homes, and lives to the living sacrament that comes to us on leaky boats from across the seas. The God fully revealed in Jesus to be love, comes to Australia as Refujesus. If we are to deal with our night-side we must ask whether at the end of time he will say to us 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'

Member Profile: Sandra Lowther-Owens

Sandra with husband Oscar, and children Matthew and Catherine

1. What do you think of Mennonite beards and/or have you ever had one?

Married one, like them most of the time.

2. What interests you most about Anabaptism?

A willingness to act on their beliefs, the call to pacifism

A balance for my other Christian experiences.

3. Favourite part of the Bible?

Hebrews

4. Least favourite part of the Bible?

At the moment Judges is my challenging book because of the continual violence.

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

Very involved with an Anglican church - of an evangelical flavour.

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

With my kids, with friends

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

Adrian Plass - a fellow Anglican, great at both helping me laugh at my foibles and encouraging me to follow my loving and forgiving God.

8. A favourite film and why?

Bride and Prejudice - on a light note (Jane Austen and Bollywood what a combination)

Kolya - a Russian film about a young boy and a lonely hurt older man who looks after him. A sad topic but a film of hope and love and redemption.

10. Politics?

pink, looking for justice and fairness, opposed to "greed is good".

11. Pastimes?

Reading, gardening, being with friends.

12. What will you remember most about the 2000s?

The lies and emptiness of "the dream" we were promised - having young kids, a desire for community and a search for the spiritual.

On The Road Subscription and Submissions

The AAANZ quarterly journal publishes news, articles and reviews. It is published electronically.

Subscription is free, though we encourage you to contribute to AAANZ; to subscribe, email Mark and Mary: AAANZ@iprimus.com.au

We welcome submissions. To contribute, please send your piece to the editor, Nathan Hobby, nathanhobby@gmail.com. Submissions should be in Microsoft Word or Rich Text Format.

The theme for issue 44 is 'Last Things'. Suggestions for articles:

- The renewal of the Earth
- Hell and Anabaptism
- Universalism and Anabaptism
- Annihilationism and Anabaptism
- Death and Anabaptism
- Anabaptist responses to Left Behind, the rapture and Christian Zionist eschatology.
- Reviews of books on the future of creation, the afterlife, the end of the world

Themed and unthemed submissions are welcome. Deadline is 8 March.

The theme for issue 44 is 'Last Things'. Themed and unthemed submissions welcome.

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