ON THE ROAD

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Sexuality

Contents

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From the Editor

Nathan Hobby

I read somewhere that when churches say they want to talk about 'sexuality', they really mean they want to talk about *homo*sexuality. Although this OTR is weighted toward homosexuality, two of the articles provide broader frames for thinking about sexuality, one from the Old Testament and the other from New Testament.

Mark Hurst offers a fresh appreciation of the Song of Songs. Reading this reminded me that before we leap forward to trying to answer our questions today, pausing to reflect on the Bible's poetic celebration of sex is a good thing.

Andreana Reale examines the social dimensions of sexual sin, painting a picture of 'porneia' in the New Testament world.

Sometimes it's frustrating when people won't give direct (I've just deleted 'straight') answers in debates over homosexuality and Christianity. But Jesus wasn't always one for direct answers, and neither is Shane Fenwick in his article, reminding us of what we can be sure of: a call to love our neighbours as ourselves.

The likelihood of you being offended by at least one of the last two articles is higher than most OTRs.

David Griffin gives a direct answer in his article, a staunch rejection of the arguments for gay marriage. Many of his arguments are familiar, but his style is unfamiliar, and his case framed in a way that is going to make Anabaptists listen harder than typical evangelical arguments. Central to David's case is the idea that homosexuality is one of the points at which radical Christians should be at odds with the world, holding onto the difficult teaching of the New Testament, just as radical Christians have done with nonviolence.

Danny Klopovic relates Anabaptism and homosexuality in a very different way, describing his self-understanding as a neo-Anabaptist queer (and vice-versa). This is not apologetics for homosexuality in a Christian context, but a brief exploration of identity which assumes it. For those overly familiar with the to-ing and fro-ing over the same handful of Bible verses, it may startle.

Mark and Mary, in their column on the next page, quote from Walter Wink about the way this conversation should be conducted and our first duty to love one another. I urge you to hold firm to this advice as you read OTR 53.

The view from Ephesians 4

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

Mark and Mary Hurst, AAANZ staffworkers

The verses in Ephesians chapter four that are behind this column are verses 11 to 13. Speaking about the gifts Jesus gives to the church it includes "…pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

Quite a job description! As pastoral workers for AAANZ we are glad that we are not alone in this task. "All of us" are to be involved in ministry and striving for unity, knowledge and maturity. We are to grow to be like Christ.

Later in verses 15 and 16 we are told, "we must grow up". How is this growth to take place? "In love."

As AAANZ pastoral workers this passage provides the big picture. The challenge is to turn this into a practical job description. And added to the challenge is the reality that we only work part-time for AAANZ. This is the task the Executive Committee has set itself to accomplish – to figure out what the best use of our time is given the big picture of Ephesians Four and the reality of part-time hours.

Our present tasks include editing the weekly AAANZ Mailings, attending conferences to represent AAANZ, teaching and leading workshops, visiting regional areas around OZ and NZ, answering emails that come into the AAANZ office, and making personal contacts with AAANZ members by phone and email.

As your pastoral workers we would like to know what it is you need to grow into Christ-likeness. What will help equip you for ministry? You can help develop our job description by letting us know what it is you would like us to do on your behalf. Write and tell us what you think.

Concerning the topic of this issue of *On The Road*, I like what Walter Wink, who sadly died recently, wrote. He edited a book on the topic of homosexuality. At the end of the book, and in online articles like the one quoted from below, Walter pled for tolerance in our discussion of this and other hot-button issues. Not only tolerance but love. Here is some of what he wrote:

> What saddens me in this whole raucous debate in the churches is how sub-Christian most of it has been. It is characteristic of our time that the issues most difficult to assess, and which have generated the greatest degree of animosity, are issues on which the Bible can be interpreted as supporting either side. I am referring to abortion and homosexuality.
>
> We need to take a few steps back, and be honest with ourselves. I am deeply convinced of the rightness of what I have said in this essay. But I must acknowledge that it is not an airtight case. You can find weaknesses in it, just as I can in others'. The truth is, we are not given unequivocal guidance in either area, abortion or homosexuality. Rather than tearing at each others' throats, therefore, we should humbly admit our limitations. How do I know I am correctly interpreting God's word for us today? How do you? Wouldn't it be wiser to lower the decibels by 95 percent and quietly present our beliefs, knowing full well that we might be wrong.
>
> I know a couple, both well known Christian authors in their own right, who have both spoken out on the issue of homosexuality. She supports gays, passionately; he opposes their behaviour, strenuously. So far as I can tell, this couple still enjoy each other's company, eat at the same table, and, for all I know, sleep in the same bed. [He is speaking of the Campolos. See www.bridges-across.org/ba/campolo.htm for a debate between Peggy and Tony Campolo.]
>
> We in the church need to get our priorities straight. We have not reached a consensus about who is right on the issue of homosexuality. But what is clear, utterly clear, is that we are commanded to love one another. Love not just our gay sisters and brothers, who are often sitting besides us, unacknowledged, in church, but all of us who are involved in this debate. These are issues about which we should amiably agree to disagree. We don't have to tear whole denominations to shreds in order to air our differences on this point. If that couple I mentioned can continue to embrace across this divide, surely we can do so as well.
>
> (www.bridges-across.org/ba/winkhombib.htm)

Sex raises some pretty good questions

President's Report

Doug Sewell, AAANZ President

"Love is the answer, but while you are waiting for the answer sex raises some pretty good questions," wrote Woody Allen. And I can't help laugh out loudly whilst thinking I wish we talked about sex and our sexuality more freely than we allow ourselves to do, given its centrality to life.

I'm pleased therefore this issue of *On The Road* is about sexuality, a subject not talked about well in most religious circles. The chasm between the church's words about sexual morality and its often hypocritical practice has done enormous damage to the integrity of the church's message of love and stifled healthy talk about sex.

The Saint Augustine who saw human sexuality as an irredeemable curse and formulated his theology of concupiscence whereby sexual desire seeded and transmitted original sin was the same Augustine in his youth who openly said, "Oh Lord, give me chastity, but do not give it yet." At least he was up front in his writings about sex.

A scarcity of Reformation period writing on sexuality means we know very little about early Anabaptist attitudes on the subject other than their general condemnation of immorality in line with an ethic of purity and self-control. A strong practice of adherence to their beliefs and moral standards while the norm was not followed amongst all the radical groups. Willard Krabill, in an article on sexuality published online in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia, describes how such irregularities in a few cases resulted in a form of a "spiritual marriage" between some Anabaptists "not as a demonstration of sexual license but for purposes of procreation, there being more women than men in the movement, a situation exacerbated by persecution." The patriarchal domination in the formative movement rings alarm bells in my mind about gender inequality and exploitation. Or am I merely looking at their situation through my modern cultural lens?

Modern understandings of human sexuality by the church in our times have been more reactive rather than proactive, reacting to the changing values and practices of a secular society. An increasingly permissive culture, the feminist liberation movement, and the gay rights movement have generated a new interest and study of human sexuality.

Christians have by and large inadequately understood and addressed the biblical understandings of the sexual dimensions of human personality and life. "We have still not formulated a well thought out theology of the body nor of sexuality," says Krabill. The moralisation and spiritualisation of the scriptural text has meant we fail to see properly the importance of the human dimension and the anthropology of the biblical story, warts and all.

In recent decades there has been a beginning of a new era in Christian male-female relationships and gender equality. This is far from the ending of a process and Christians need to articulate more clearly and speak out louder about how Jesus broke down barriers of separation.

A new generation of Anabaptist radicals at http://young.anabaptistradicals.org are declaring that in contrast to the doctrine of original sin, where everyone is born with a sinful nature, they 'believe in original goodness, that the spark of the divine resides in each and every human being (Psalms 82:6, John 1:9)'. And whereas the church portrays God as the heavenly father, they 'believe in God as mother, as well as father (Isaiah 49:15)'.

I look forward to hearing some passionate discussion and let's let sex raise some pretty good questions.

The Bible's love song

Mark Hurst

The Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon or Canticles) comes up only once in the three-year cycle of lectionary readings, and then only as an alternative reading. When it came around last year I couldn't resist using it for a sermon at Avalon Baptist Peace Memorial Church in Sydney.

The reading for the day, the second chapter of the book, is part of a love poem in which the beloved is calling upon his love to come away. In the eight chapters of the book, the term "my beloved" is used twenty seven times by the young woman and five times by the "women of Jerusalem" (your beloved). This form of address is very personal and the mutuality of the relationship is apparent. When the beloved seeks her to come away, the Hebrew emphasises the urgency with imperatives, "arise", "come". They are repeated. Images of spring and nature both are used to describe the beloved and acknowledge it is the right time to be together. Desire and love are present in all the images and v.16 is the covenant of mutuality – "My beloved is mine and I am his."

The extraordinary thing is the fact that the woman is saying these words; one would have expected from within the culture that it would be the declaration of the man. It is the only book in the Old Testament that has a woman's voice in such a prominent role.

I needed two readers on the day, a woman and a man. As it happened, we got a man and a woman who were not married to each other to read the passage. It added some humour to our scripture reading that Sunday. The woman read 2:1; 3-6; 8-10a; 16-17 and the man read 2:2; 7; 10b-15. Here is how it was read:

> **Woman**: I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.
> **Man**: As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens.
> **Woman**: As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his intention toward me was love. Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am faint with love. O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!
> **Man**: I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the wild does: do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!
> **Woman**: The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me:
> **Man**: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards— for our vineyards are in blossom."
> **Woman**: My beloved is mine and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on the cleft mountains.

After this erotic reading of Old Testament scripture I shared with the congregation how when I was studying this passage during the week, I received the following poem in a daily email I get.

> **Siren**
> by Robert Hass
>
> Here is the poem I meant to write
> But didn't
> Because you walked into my study

Without any clothes on.

I had just been thinking of how the Aegean sun
Must have lit up the faces of Troy's fallen heroes
When you walked into my study
Without any clothes on—

Walked in and stood there,
Holding a glass of sherry
Over your left breast,
Which looked soft and firm as Brie.

Your tone of voice this morning
Should have warned me
That you might walk into my study
Without any clothes on.

I should have lashed myself to my chair
And stoppered my ears with wax.
But I forgot.
And I'm glad I forgot

Because when you walked into my study
Without any clothes on
You sang sweetly, sang sweetly,
And I died nobly, like a man.

The Song of Songs is the Bible's only extensive discourse on human, erotic love. The book consists of a series of poems in which the speech of two lovers is interspersed with occasional comments by other voices. There is no narrative but cycles of absence and presence mark the action in the book. The woman is the more active and articulate character.

In a reversal of the punishment of Eve in Genesis 3:16 ("your *desire* shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"), the woman in the Song declares, "I am my beloved's, and his *desire* is for me."(7:10) The Hebrew word used here for "desire" is used only three times in the Old Testament; here and in Genesis. Its use in the Song is a clear link back to the damaged relationship in Genesis. Kathryn Schifferdecker (2009) writes:

> As Ellen Davis has argued, the Song reverses the curses of the Garden of Eden, including the rupturing of the relationship between man and woman. There is a mutuality about this love that repairs that rupture and places the lovers back into the Garden. (And, indeed, the Song is overflowing with images of lush gardens and abundant fruit; no thorns or thistles here.)

The Song celebrates faithful human love. For that reason alone, it could be argued; the Song deserves a place in Scripture. In a culture saturated with sexual images but sorely lacking in prominent examples of lifelong faithful love, this text celebrates love between a man and a woman that is marked by mutuality and fidelity. Martin Copenhaver (2011) writes:

> The lovers linger over every inch of each other in voluptuous celebration, savouring all the physical characteristics of the beloved. It is almost enough to get the Bible banned from public libraries. If young adolescents ever happened upon this torrid little book, they might begin to read the Bible with flashlights under their covers at night.

He goes on:

> Encountering these love songs in the pages of the Bible reminds me of the time when, as a teenager, I discovered ardent letters written by my grandparents when they were in the throes of young love. The discovery completed my picture of them. They were real people after all, animated by the kind of impulses and yearnings I knew quite well. These dignified and upright people—who before my discovery I could only imagine going to bed fully clothed—also had a love for one another that was as hungry and tumultuous as the sea. And as their lives demonstrated, passionate love for another person need not eclipse God but can enlarge a life in ways that make room for God to be manifest—something I might have missed if those letters had remained undiscovered and my picture of my grandparents had remained incomplete.

A number of poetic techniques are used in the book including wordplays, puns, repetition, similes, metaphors and double entendres to highlight the relationship between the two lovers.

Authorship and dating are unknown. And the genre and function of the text are debated.

> "The Song's positive focus on human, erotic love, its silence regarding the central theological and historical themes of the rest of the biblical text, and the centrality of its female character, make it unique within the biblical canon." (Jewish Study Bible)

Some argue that it was included in the Bible as a description of the love relationship between God and Israel. The prophetic books often used the human love relationship as a metaphor for the God-Israel relationship. For whatever reason it was added to scripture, from early on it was interpreted allegorically (symbolically).

One author complains about this saying:

> It's a bit much to have Christ telling the church that "the joints of thy thighs are like jewels" (7:1), or to accept the view of Hippolytus that the man's praise of his lover's breasts-- "Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins" (7:3)--means that the Old and New Testaments are glorious.
> (Tucker)

In the Middle Ages, more "commentaries" were written on the Song of Songs than any other book in the Old Testament. Some thirty works were completed on the Song in the twelfth century alone. Following the lead of earlier interpreters, the medieval exegetes believed the Bible had spiritual meaning as well as a literal meaning. From this they developed a method of interpretation to uncover the "fourfold meaning of Scripture": the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the mystical. Medieval interpreters pressed beyond the literal meaning to discover additional levels of meaning.

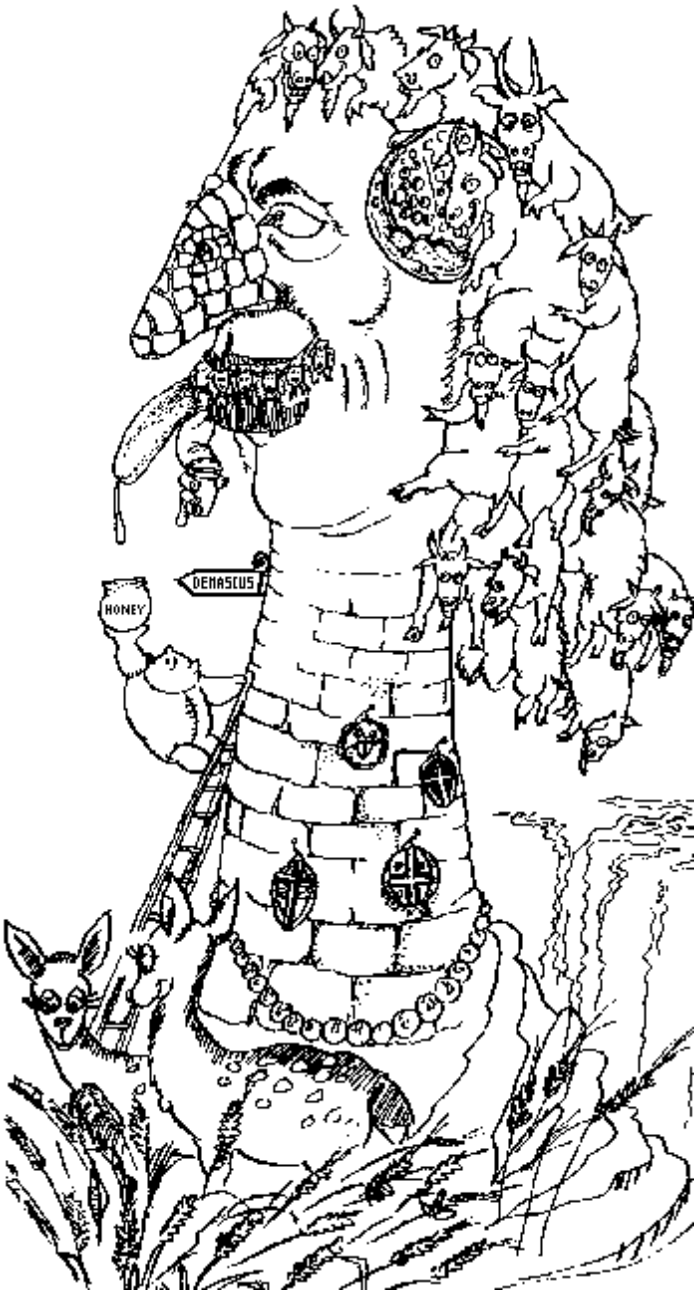
For people today who are literalists, this picture is an artist's take on what the female lover would look like.

The Song of Solomon Illustrated (For our literalist friends)

How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful you are!
Your eyes are like doves behind your veil. ...
Your hair is like a flock of goats...
Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes...
Your lips are like a scarlet thread,
Your temples are like a slice of pomegranate...
...Your neck is like the tower of David built with rows of stones on which are hung a thousand shields...
... Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle which feed among the lilies...
... Your lips, my bride, drip honey,
Honey and milk are under your tongue...
And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.
Your belly is like a heap of wheat...
... Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, which faces towards Damascus…

(From Song of Solomon chapters 4 and 7)

www.acts17-11.com/snip_song.html



Middle Ages monastic commentaries on the Song concentrated on the relationship between Christ (the Bridegroom) and the soul (the Bride), rather than Christ and the church universal (or God-Israel). The emphasis usually was on the human response to divine love, not on divine love alone. God's love was assumed while our response to such love became the subject of intense reflection. The language of *eros*, of yearning, used in the Song was seen as an apt way to describe the human response to God's love.

Bernard of Clairvaux, who became an abbot at the young age of twenty-four, composed eighty-six sermons on the Song over a period of eighteen years to instruct his order, a twelfth-century Benedictine reform movement known as the Cistercians of Clairvaux. (And he didn't even get out of chapter 2.) He encouraged his followers to use *lectio divina*, divine reading and listening, to explore the Song. Through reflection on the Song, he discovered that the journey to God's love does not consist in finding a path, as much as in being found on the path by the Bridegroom who passionately seeks his bride.

He saw in the Song a union with the Divine that generates a love bathed in action. "Then once again, having tasted the inebriation of contemplative love, [the soul] strives to win souls with its habitual fire and renewed courage" (Sermon 58:1). He explains "love reveals itself, not by words or phrases, but by action and experience" (Sermon 70:1). Thus Bernard's moral reflection on the Song is not merely an exercise in our personal experience of God. Such contemplation, no matter how exalted, is never complete unless it leads us to love our neighbours.

Teresa of Avila's brief Meditations on the Song of Songs, written to her "sisters" and "daughters in the Lord," was the first treatment of this biblical book by a woman before the twentieth century. Apparently her confessor at the time gave Teresa permission to record her reflections on the Song. Yet her later confessor and a theologian of the Inquisition, Diego de Yanguas, read *Meditations on the Song of Songs* and ordered it burned. She complied, but by this time the nuns had made additional copies that were preserved.

Her object, like Bernard's, was not to grasp the literal meaning of the text, but to be seized by the text itself.

Teresa invites us not to explain but to enjoy Scripture as it leads toward divine union. The impassioned language of the Song, suggests Teresa, kindles our emotions when we read it, generating within us a desire for the fullness of experience associated with divine union. And in loving God so intimately, we discover our true life in the peace and friendship of the Divine Bridegroom.

> The sexually explicit language of the Song (which can be so problematic for modern readers) allowed the mystics to express their personal yearning for the Divine and to inspire a love of God in those under their care. Only the Song's language of intense and intimate love could convey their longing for and separation from the Divine Bridegroom. Our own expressions of a longing for, and love of, the Divine Bridegroom frequently falters. Our language lacks the intensity and intimacy expressed by the Song and invoked by the writers. While our love of God may not be any less than theirs, our ability to articulate such love has surely suffered from our neglect of such rich images. The mystics remind us that what is on our lips most surely expresses what is in our hearts. (Tucker)

"I am my beloved's and he is mine. His banner over me is love." Amen.

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Is sexual sin communal sin?

Andreana Reale

This article first appeared on Relevant Magazine in May 2010, www.relevantmagazine.com.

It is unfortunate that the word *porneia*—used on numerous occasions by the Apostle Paul—has no modern English equivalent. Older versions of the Bible translate it as "fornication" (which we think of as premarital sex), while newer ones often say "sexual immorality".

1 Corinthians 6.12-20 indicates that intercourse with a prostitute is one form of porneia, and earlier at 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 incest is also part of the definition. Porneia is clearly something bad, and something to do with our bodies. But what does porneia really mean? And more importantly, how are Paul's writings on porneia to transform our hearts, minds and lives?

The world of porneia

To get a better picture of the meaning of porneia, one needs to carve a window into the Greco-Roman world. Through this window you may see the following:

- Orgies at the dinner parties of the rich and famous.
- Exploited girls, boys and animals, made to dance and provide lewd entertainment for the gratification of guests.
- Older men in paedophilic relationships with younger boys.
- Debauchery, greed, exploitation, abuse.

Romans 1 speaks of this context: "... God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator …"

When we see a snippet of the world in which Paul was writing, we can see why he chooses porneia to head up his lists of vices. "Porneia, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like … those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God," he warns in Galatians 5.19-21, and similarly in lists elsewhere in his writings. Even in these few verses, we get a picture of life in the Greco-Roman world.

This is the home for the word porneia. "Fornication" does not begin to grasp what it was, for it went so much further than premarital sex. Even "sexual immorality" does not really get it, for the degree of exploitation went far beyond private morality.

Porneia and the world

In life we make a choice: do we look inward, serving only ourselves, or do we look outward, serving our neighbours, our world and our God? Porneia is a choice for the former. It is the pursuit of fleeting, bodily pleasures with little regard for others. Its results are exploitation and abuse, cutting at the ties between couples, within families and between friends and communities. As such, porneia is ultimately very public behaviour.

It is the public nature of porneia that causes Paul to situate it in a group context. One of Paul's favourite metaphors is that of a body. He did not dream this up on his own: rather, it is the product of a long tradition in Greco-Roman rhetoric. The polis or city-state was often portrayed as a body, with strife, discord and civil disobedience seen as diseases in need of eradication. Paul takes up this metaphor and applies it not to a secular institution, but rather to the Christian community. It is this communal body that is important to Paul.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" asks Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:19. What doesn't come across in our English translation is that "your" is plural and "body" is singular. In the Southern United States they might say something like, "Don't y'all know that the body of y'all is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" In other words, the Holy Spirit dwells in the communal body. Community members have their own bodies, but are simultaneously part of the "body of Christ."

It is this communal body that porneia so threatens. "Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute?" asks Paul in 1 Corinthians 15b. The answer, of course, is "no". Not only does this compromise the individual, but also the integrity of the whole.

Porneia is as much a part of our own Western societies as it was for Paul's. Think about the sexual ethic that dominates our airwaves, billboards, bars and bedrooms. We are a society that believes in consequence -free sex; in sex that is first and foremost fun; sex that is removed from communities and severed from reproduction and children. At the centre of sex lies not the family or even the couple but the individual, and what is paramount is that the sexual needs of the individual are met.

Like any other application of rampant individualism, such a self-centered sexual ethic finds its ultimate destination in abuse and exploitation. We damage not only ourselves, but those in our midst: using people, hurting people, raping people, abandoning people. This is the heart of porneia.

Our alternative: agape and the bonds of fidelity.

Porneia looks inward, concerned about fulfilling my needs and my desires. The opposite—which looks outward at our neighbours, world and God—is known as *agape*. It is no surprise that Paul's lists of virtues (e.g. the fruits of the Spirit) are headed by agape, in direct contrast to porneia.

Agape finds its root not in fleeting pleasure, but in fidelity: the commitment to lasting connections. For Paul, fidelity is the cure for porneia: "Since there is so much porneia", says Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.2, "each man should have his own woman, and each woman her own man." Fidelity gives sex a place that is wider and deeper than the individual. Rather than sex itself and the pleasure it affords holding value, it is the lasting connections that are ultimately precious.

Fidelity goes beyond the couple, extending into ever -expanding networks of friendships, families and communities. It is marriage, not one-night-stands; life-long friends, not single-serve drunken encounters; growing your own carrots, not plucking a microwave meal from a shelf. It is those family relationships that are difficult but important; it is our commitment to tend to the earth, inconvenient though it is, because we know we need its lasting care. Porneia destroys bonds, but fidelity strengthens them.

We must think about porneia in terms of how it harms the couple, the family, the community, the earth—rather than simply the effect on one's own morality. The body of y'all is valuable: let's care for it in the spirit of fidelity.

Sexuality: a young Anabaptist's perspective

Shane Fenwick

Sexuality. It's a topic that would make most church folk shuffle uneasily in their seats. But it's a topic that has become increasingly public; the controversy surrounding gay marriage is constantly in the light of the Australian media. And it's something that we – as people of the church – can no longer attempt to 'sweep under the carpet'.

Now, I'm not going to – in the few words I have to say – try and convince and argue my own opinion of whether I think gay marriage is 'right' or not, and so on. I hope to simply present my broader perspective on the issue of sexuality as a young, male, heterosexual Anabaptist.

Growing up in a sheltered Christian family, in a sheltered area of Sydney, and going to a sheltered Christian school, I had very little contact with anyone who was gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT). In fact, I – quite frankly – didn't really care, as it was something that I was never confronted with. As I left school, went to University, met and befriended a number of GLBT folks, I was forced to re-examine my own prejudices and stereotypes of the GLBT community. It broke my heart to hear their stories – particularly those from a Christian background – of the pain and rejection they experienced, from both their families and the church.

One of my psychology tutors – a former pastor himself – is currently undertaking his PhD on sexuality and religion, with findings so far indicating that Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual (GLB) individuals from a religious background fare much worse on mental health indicators than those from a non-religious background. Specifically, GLB persons who identified as Christian were far more psychologically distressed, and showed higher internalised homonegativity than their non-Christian counterparts. GLB Christians who reported more supportive religious and family environments had much lower psychological stress than those from more 'anti-gay' religious and family backgrounds.

My new exposure to the GLBT community has forced me to ask the question: *how do I respond to these folks, as a follower of Jesus? And how is my faith – the gospel that I claim to live by – good news to many of these folks who have experienced so much hate, pain, and rejection?*

As Anabaptists, this is a question we should all be asking. *How do we live an authentic, Christ-centred faith in regards to our GLBT brothers and sisters? How are we being Christ's hands and feet to that community?* Whether you believe homosexuality, or homosexual relationships, are 'right' or not, we must always keep a few important things in mind -

1. How are we responding in a Christ-centred way to the GLBT community that seeks to embody the core Anabaptist values of non-violent love for our neighbours and reconciliation with our enemies?

2. Do we *know* our GLBT brothers and sisters? How are we striving to foster relationships with them?

3. Are we striving to *include* GLBT folks in our communities? Are our communities reflective of God's unconditional love?

4. As a group that has experienced so much oppression and marginalisation, are we choosing to come alongside them? How are we embodying Christ's message of 'good news to the poor', and letting the 'oppressed go free'? (Luke 4:18, NRSV)

5. Rather than taking a legalistic-minded 'right' and 'wrong' approach, we need to take a deeper look at sexuality, and how it ties in with identity.

6. Lastly, how are we looking at these issues in God's wider story of redemption, reconciliation, and restoration?

Once we consider these, we realise that the issues surrounding sexuality are much deeper than the typical

the whole '*is* _____ *right / wrong*' debate. Recently, I went to a dialogue called 'A different conversation', where folks were free to talk about the intersection between faith and sexuality in a safe environment. There, they referred to the 'Charter for Compassion', and one of the paragraphs particularly stood out to me, which I think is so relevant to the present situation –

> We therefore call upon all men and women – to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion – to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred, or disdain is illegitimate – to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions, and cultures – to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity – to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings – even those regarded as enemies.

May we never lose sight of the non-violent, risen Messiah that we follow, and his peaceable Kingdom, which knows *no* bounds. As the Apostle Paul wrote in the Scriptures, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39, NRSV). One's race, gender, and even sexual orientation, cannot separate them from the love of God we see revealed in our Lord. As Anabaptists, may we continue to live God's love; standing alongside our GLBT brothers and sisters (many of whom are hurting), even though we may not have an easy answer to everything. May we continue to practice love and reconciliation; embodying our God's glorious story of love, reconciliation, and restoration for this broken world.

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Same sex marriage: why the arguments fail

David Griffin

Nietzsche…contrasts instinct with knowledge. [For him] the history of civilisation is the history of increasing repression, or steadily proliferating checks on the instincts.

This development is against nature.

- John Carroll, *Ego and Soul*

Nietzsche closes in. He who accused Christianity of "ardent hostility to the instincts [and] passions" is borne along upon the shoulders of his modern disciples. Civilization's well established and rationally justifiable concept of marriage is pushed nearer the precipice by homo-erotic instincts. The modern university itself shares the blame, long ago abandoning any commitment to the civilising Platonic values of the good, the true and the beautiful, demonstrating the "advance of nihilistic high culture" (Carroll). The art establishment's defence of Polanski's sex with a drugged 12-year-old girl, the prostituting of higher education to mere economic benefit, and the selective outrage against the sins of the conservatives is evidence enough. Will churches soon follow, as so many are now shredded of belief in their own beliefs, being emotionally cowered into false humility by alien voices?

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In the mid 1970's I attended the Fourth National Homosexual Conference at Paddington Town Hall, Sydney. Consequently, I wrote a report for the national conference of the Christian organisation I then worked with. The discussion was lively, but it was clear to me that the normalising of homosexuality was not a positive social good.

Since then I have not changed my mind. The softening of Christian sexual ethics commenced in the 60s and 70s, initiating a progressive retreat of the civilising restraint of both customary and positive law upon *eros*. The slogan of the 60s, "All sins are equal!" really meant, "Stop picking on sex!" But all sins are not equal: murdering the greengrocer receives greater social and judicial condemnation than simply stealing his fruit. Adultery is worse than fornication, while single-celibacy is Christ-like. *Eros* needs civilising, not unleashing.

In the late 1980s I attended some public lectures at a Sydney university by a leading American Anabaptist ethicist. When asked about homosexuality, he replied that "gay" is a political term with a social agenda, "homosexuality" is a medical term from the 19th century to describe a pathology, whereas he simply preferred the word "sodomite." The audience included leading university academics and many students. He experienced no intimidation; no gasps were heard.

Contrast today, where the emotional intimidation experienced by opponents of same-sex marriage at the last federal ALP National Conference was palpable. Recently, a Senator called traditionalists on marriage 'bigots'. Emotional intimidation works by gnawing away confidence, calling in tribal loyalty, and producing guilt. Like being a Holden man for forty years, the emotional tribalist will buy another Commodore even though the Falcon wins every test. Both left and right political

leanings share this sense of loyalty, but the left-progressive grievance movement has latched onto same sex marriage as a litmus test of human equality, supported by small "l" liberals.

So where does the marriage equality policy fail? We consider four matters: love, law, human nature, and faithfulness.

1. Love as the Only Criterion.

A moment's reflection will answer this. If love is the only criterion, then the minimum marriageable age is abandoned, and as marriage is by definition a sexual relationship, the age of consent is also gone. To reinstate a minimum age is to abandon love as the sole criterion. The "love only" argument is salacious, violent to young girls, and obscene.

2. Law

Legally, marriage has three criteria: sexual differentiation (male and female), number (two) and duration (for life). The new policy aims to overturn only the first. But the logic implies that if public pressure can overturn the first criteria, why not the second and third criteria?

If equality is extended to homosexuals only, this is discriminatory against bisexuals who may desire a marital troika. If denied, where is their equality? And further, as polygamy has no real precedent in Western culture, I suspect that the criterion of number (two people) is predicated upon the criterion of sexual differentiation. With the first criterion gone, may not those from traditionally polygamous cultures also claim discrimination? Claims like this have arisen already in Western Europe.

Such slippery slope arguments are often mocked, as I did when dismissing opponents of in-vitro fertilisation who argued that it might undermine the link between marriage and children. I accepted the assurances of parliaments and hospital ethics committees that only medically infertile married couples would be eligible for IVF. Such a policy has long been overturned, so that socially infertile lesbians, medically infertile de-factos, and singles, now have access to such treatments.

Some Anabaptists may support same sex marriage on the basis of separation of church and state. Separation of church and state has always included a prophetic stance towards the state. But prophets preached messages of both weal and woe. When the Assyrians attacked Jerusalem, Isaiah reassured Hezekiah to hold his line and not capitulate to the inevitability of defeat. Yet Jeremiah's woe pronounced the opposite concerning Babylon, a century and a half later. A prophetic ministry is not antiestablishment, but simply free from the state to preach either weal or woe: weal when basic human matters are threatened from outside the state, woe when they lurk inside the state. Jesus preached warming comfort, and fiery judgment. If we believe in common grace and providence, there must be true good in some long-standing social traditions. An emotional stance against traditional values does not amount to being prophetic, just reactionary. We are, I suggest, at an Isaiah moment.

In modern emotivist language, secularists express church-state separation as "not forcing my opinion on others". No mention of secular opinions being forced down people's throats: forced opinions are tacitly considered to be only religious ones, amounting to religious bullying. The religiously insulting language is plain in the term "bigot". Emotivism is chiefly characterised by the denial that there are any substantive realities in moral matters, and that all such disagreement is purely a matter of opinion. Because it lacks belief in moral substance, emotivism reduces to simple "Yeah!" "Boo" matches: may the best arguer, biggest bully, strongest voice, best insulter, win. Accordingly we have the intimidatory term "homophobic," insinuating that opponents have a phobia, a mental illness, while being a post-childrearing, post-divorce lesbian receives spontaneous celebration. Christians must resist the emotivist temptation.

Same sex marriage is a different legal matter than decriminalisation of homosexual acts, where the state acted in a rather Lockean fashion by removing punitive response. It did not argue that such acts were good, but simply declared them not illegal. In respect to marriage, however, the state would act in reverse: it would legally establish same-sex marriage as a good, as positive law always intends to legally establish what are considered to be social goods. Although marriage is a social good, Christians cannot support same-sex marriage, for nothing that is contrary to the good that comes from God who is truly Good, can become a social good and thus acquire positive legal endorsement.

Consequently the argument of separation of church and state holds no water here. Freedom of religion is a negative aspect in our Constitution: paragraph 116 *prohibits* (negatively) parliament from legally establishing a religion, it does not *establish* (positively) non-religion as a legal good. The state simply has no legal opinion. But homosexual marriage is the opposite: here is a relationship that is given legal establishment and status as a fundamental social and human good. I contend that the state has no powers to include in the meaning of marriage any sexual union it so desires, for this amounts to a form of state moral absolutism.

Radical Christians have always offered a clear voice, grounded in Scripture, of the radicality of the Gospel. We call governments to enact Christian principles, such as distributive justice for the weak and poor, peace-making, or lifting Australian overseas aid to 0.07% GDP, the UN bench mark for developed countries. We ought to be as radical in calling governments to enact Christian principles in respect to human sexuality.

And what of human rights and equality? Contemporary Western human rights express the core value of liberalism, that is, the rights of the individual. This sits uneasily with Anabaptist communal life and discernment. For Locke, the state must not interfere with a person's use of their bodies, for like furniture, they are our inalienable property to be safeguarded from the state. Equality thus becomes the rights of individuals to pursue their own interest almost as a property right, yet remains void of any substantial determination of what constitutes the human good. Any real good vanishes because the self is now *incurvatus in se* (turned in on itself), Luther's classic definition of the sin. The good is simply my decision, empty of content; "I choose, therefore I am." When theological transcendence disappears, people collapse into the immanence of their own ego, which is found often in *eros,* or Dionysian emotions.

While property rights may have some circumscribed political merit, it has no theological substance: "You are not your own; you where bought with a price. Therefore honour God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19f). So God has the right to tell us what we can and cannot do with our genitals, as he has with our hands (no punching), our tongues (no cursing) and our wallets (no greed, but generosity and justice). All people, not just Christians, are stewards of their bodies just as much as they are stewards of their wealth.

Equality, a core liberal concept, possesses limited value in this matter. The term "same-sex marriage" has become "marriage equality" – this is the politics of sentiment which accuses its opponents of treating people unequally, akin to racism. Yet equality of human worth does not equate to identity of relationships or treatment. Despite the rhetoric, we do not treat people equally, but properly make discriminatory evaluations everywhere as matter of course. The minimum marriageable age is an example: minors are equal as persons in God's sight, but are properly prohibited from marrying. Other criteria of discrimination are also validly applied both socially and legally. Yet because equality is a motherhood concept brooking no opposition, the strategy is simple: by making a cause to be at core a matter of equality, disagreement is accused of harshly and cruelly denying a person's humanity, a form of abuse. Stanley Hauerwas wrote in the 80s that Christians will increasingly be seen as cruel - surely a prophetic insight.

3. Humanity

The radicality of the Gospel challenges the eroticising of our culture. As the celibate Jesus is our example of properly fulfilled humanity, sexual activity is unessential for human flourishing. He also affirmed the marriage pattern of Genesis. A celibate Christian homosexual is living a more faithful Christian life that his fornicating Christian friend. Can we speak this language any more, or have we lost our native moral tongue by linguistic colonisation by secularism? In this matter liberalist political language dominates, just as medical language has colonised human well being: sloth and gluttony, two deadly sins to be repented of, are now the obesity crisis, rectified by surgery. As sexual sin is against one's own body (1 Cor. 6:18), it is a basic form of self-harm. The belief that limiting sex minimises people's humanity is an erotic lie. Christians are more at home with radical celibacy and chastity (i.e. faithful marriage), than in the continual triumphant march of any Nietzschean instinctive hedonism which celebrates the unchecked drives of biology. After all, the polygenesis theory of Anabaptist origins places our antecedents partially in western monasticism, a place where *eros* was tamed through spiritual disciplines.

Homosexual relations and heterosexual relations cannot be equated. The fact that the adjective is necessary implies as such. Sexual differentiation is an ineradicable aspect of human nature, so that relations between the sexes are deemed to be different to relations between people of the same sex. Language embodies this: we are uncles or aunts, husbands or wives, sons or daughters.

Barth argues that sexual differentiation is the only definitive distinction in created humanity. If so, celebrated homoeroticism amounts to a form of sexual xenophobia, a primal psychosexual turning away from the sexually different. Homosexual inclination, while not culpable, is nonetheless disordered, for it evidences a cleavage between anatomy and drives. Desire is not self -justifying, despite Lady Gaga's anthem *Made That Way.* There is no wholeness here, no integration between sexual anatomy and sexual orientation.

4. Faithfulness

What we have here, it appears to me, is Norman Lindsay versus the clergy again: Hellenism verses Hebraism. Of course, Hellenism had both high rationalism and high hedonism, so today's (homo) erotic aestheticism is buttressed by haute rationalism that

denies traditional sexual values almost as a matter of tribal identity. Hebraic faith however turns the other way, seeking covenant faithfulness to God and active righteous love towards the other as primary values. Covenant faithfulness to others cannot be equated with liberalism's concept of self-determination. Old Testament *shalom* is an outcome of justice and righteousness, which describe not liberal views of self-determination, but being rightly related to others and God in accordance with his will and Law.

Our concept of faithful discipleship calls us to reject the world and all its ways. The principalities and powers include the (homo) eroticising of our culture, expressed in the intimidation as such. Supporting marriage for homosexuals is not assisting the weak, poor and alienated, but enabling a haute-cultured elite to reshape a fundamental social good in their own eroticised image. The lower classes likely suffer the most again, with the uneducated and alienated becoming even more confused about themselves, with increasing levels of anger.

Finally, over many decades of Christian ministry, every time I have heard the secularist siren, "The church must get in touch with the world," when pressed, the speaker always means *eros*, always, no exception, never. Harsh treatment of asylum-seekers, dry economic policies devoid of compassion or increased militarism are never mentioned. The world, not the church, is obsessed with sex. There is no glossy lads magazine called *Benedict* outside Catholic churches parading a nubile girl spilling out of her bikini: these are found elsewhere. A sixteenth century Anabaptist argued that the divine vocation of the ungodly is to harass Christians, testing faithfulness. Is the current eroticising of culture a mild expression of this?

Anabaptist vice, queer virtue

Danny Klopovic

Juxtaposed are two images, the left being a 1536 engraving held in Paris at the Bibliotheque Nationale, (the National Library of France) titled *The Society of Anabaptists*, created by Heinrich Aldegraver (1502-58) and Virgil Solis (1514-62). The second is a photograph that appeared in the front page of *The New York Daily News* on Sunday, 29 June 1969, showing gay street kids, the most marginalised within the queer community, being the first to fight with the police in the Stonewall riots.

The engraving actually depicts a bathhouse scene (Gary K Waite, 2007, 205) but given its creation a year after the fall of the Anabaptist kingdom of Munster, its suitability for use in polemical material to represent pictorially the anxieties swirling around the Anabaptists as being an anarchic, dangerous movement, especially prone to sexual licence, was assured. The photograph is here used to reference, symbolically, the birth of the gay and lesbian liberation movements, even though there was already a history of organising and struggle by queer people going back to at least the early 1800s. In pairing the two, I wish to explore briefly how two radical traditions, Anabaptism and queer liberation, inform and shape my understanding of sexuality.

However, I do not propose outlining a biblical argument – I defer here to the work of others. I particularly appreciate in this regard, amongst others, the work of Gareth Moore, Pim Pronk, Kathy Rudy, James Alison, and perhaps strangely, Pope John Paul II's theology of the body.

First of all, some notes on terminology – I prefer the term "queer" both as a self-description and as an inclusive term for those who are non-heterosexual and/or gender non-conforming, without however presuming to speak on behalf of others.

Secondly, I identify as a neo-Anabaptist Christian, if only because it is an adopted tradition rather than one I was born into. That is, having appropriated it in a form that is much more self-conscious and revisionist compared to being say a member of a historic Anabaptist church, I find that it is perhaps all too easy to disavow the "baggage" that comes with being heir to a denominational history. These aspects to my identity oscillate insofar as I cannot decide if I should identify as

a "queer neo-Anabaptist" or as a "neo-Anabaptist queer" – which aspect should qualify the other?

On the one hand, as I understand sexuality, it affects all aspects of the human person – it is constitutive of how we are as persons, how we relate to others and exist in communion with others. This means that I cannot separate what it means to embody queer sexuality from how I relate to others, hence "queer neo-Anabaptist". On the other hand, I take seriously the Pauline proclamation that in Christ, there is "no male and female" (ESV, 2007, Galatians 3:28), not as a dissolution of embodied humanity but a declaration that for Christians, in a radical sense, our identity is Christ – hence "neo-Anabaptist queer". However I cannot but witness my understanding that both aspects are truly radical – they reach to the very roots (radix) of my being.

This does mean that I presume here that queer sexuality is part of the natural human condition rather than being merely the intrinsic tendencies of specific individuals or as a recurring pathology. The good to which queer sexuality is oriented towards is that of being an alternative way of expressing interpersonal love. I construe my sexuality not as a rejection of heterosexual sexuality but rather as counterpoint.

As prelude to exploring some notes on sexuality, I'd like to register my appreciation at Caleb Anderson's observation in his article (*On the Road* 49, July 2011, 23) where he acknowledges:

> that the people I know who come closest to deserving the title 'radical Christian' don't tend to see homosexuality as a problem. But I'm not sure how much comfort this fringe popularity is to LGBT people in the face of the continuing restrictions, rejection and guilt placed upon them by those sections of society and church that remain unaffected by 'radical Christian fashion'.

I appreciate here the recognition of, *pace* conservative Christians (here I place such on the anti-gay side and their liberal counterparts on the pro-gay side, cognisant that this is a generalisation and that there are exceptions), the invidious position that queer people face as a matter of course in ordinary life, both in Australia and around the world. Almost invariably, such recognition on the part of conservative Christians comes at best as an afterthought, and, usually, at worst, not at all. So the first note I wish to sound is to say to conservative Christians, without rancour (even if I do think anger is often appropriate in this context), these words: "You are not credible". You are not credible because you have not only failed to protest discrimination and violence, but even complicitly or actively supported it.

This, I think, is the difficult truth that precedes and may even preclude any possibility for rapport. I suggest that any possible relationship is necessarily, and I think sadly at this time, one that can only be shaped by the practice of enemy-love.

I commend the uncertainty that ponders that perhaps 'radical Christian fashion', being fringe, may provide little or no comfort to queer people. This I think is something that I think liberal Christians, even given their best intentions, fail to sufficiently appreciate. It is not that I wish to disdain their support as it is difficult enough as it is. However, I have noticed what seems to be an all too common tendency amongst liberal Christians to act from a position of largesse vis-à-vis queer people, and this evokes the response, "It is not enough".

I suggest that what bedevils both conservative and liberal Christian responses to queer sexuality is their gnostic account of same – they both fail to "see" the queer Other as truly Other, as constituted as truly human.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, the conservative view is essentially shaped by the notion that there is no queer sexuality to speak of but that there are some who are "defective heterosexuals". Even where official teaching, such as given by the Catholic Church, affirms that there are "homosexual persons", this must be placed within the context of it being an "intrinsic disorder" and thus not truly constitutive of the human person.

On the flip side of liberal Christian tolerance, I see often the "honorary heterosexual". Queer people are tolerated insofar as we successfully mimic "acceptable heterosexual norms" – a suburban yuppie gay couple with 2.4 pets perhaps? One would look askance otherwise at the motley crew of leather daddies, diesel dykes, drag queens, transgender people and other "interesting characters". This in part underlies my disquiet with same-sex marriage – a development that I cannot fully endorse, but nevertheless feel obliged to support, since I fear that it is but another way of assimilating queer people so that they may be "acceptable" as "honorary heterosexuals" rather than take on the critique that the queer liberation tradition proffers to accounts of family.

One of the significant defects of the Anabaptist tradition is that although it provided a powerful critique of both external political and religious power, it failed to address questions of power within the family sphere and the community (Benjamin & Redekop, 2001). It is here that a queer perspective can remind Anabaptists of the ambiguity present within the New Testament relative to

the family as well as providing a critical corrective to Anabaptist practices of family and church life.

Given the common rejection by society, churches and birth families, queer people have, through necessity, had to form alternative expressions of family and community constructed, at best, on relationships of mutuality, shared power and grassroots leadership. Where heterosexual norms have not been unthinkingly adopted by queer people, the largely unscripted nature of queer relationships has given the space to explore opportunities for integrating sexuality, alternative forms of family life and community along different lines, with a stress on the celebration of the erotic, freedom, humour, play and an investing of sexual experience with spiritual value.

This is not to say however that everything that might flow from queer sexuality as expressed in queer communities and queer lives is recommended for adoption into the life of the Christian community. The privileging of the erotic stands in tension with the value of procreation that I think is central to a Christian sexual ethic. Rather, as I see it, the celebration of the erotic provides a distinct otherness, rather than opposition, to the affirmation of procreative primacy.

It is the distinct otherness given in queer sexuality that I find to be gift. Having experienced what it is like to be the "other" in a number of contexts, I find my sexuality essential in those areas in my life where I am not the "other". I can only reflect on my life as a white male in trying to appreciate the very real differences in the experiences of other marginalised people. My experience as a queer man offers the opportunity to partially apprehend the reality of discrimination and thus make connections to other marginalised groups struggling for liberation.

In this, I find my sexuality underscoring the Anabaptist emphasis on the liberation of the oppressed. This is both sustaining and liberating. Yet ironically it is also a source of guilt and bondage inasmuch as I realise how inadequate my commitments to liberation can be.

Anabaptism is a prophetic discipleship spirituality that is not afraid to do the hard work of "plucking up, pulling down, destroying and overthrowing, building and planting". This is also true of the impact of queer sexuality within my life and also as expressed in queer communities and their natural gravitation towards the anarchic sensibility that lives by the motto, "smash the church, smash the state".

Anabaptism is, I believe, a radically incarnational spirituality. Where prophetic spirituality readily discriminates between the "holy" and "unholy" and draws absolute lines, an incarnational spirituality runs the risk of blasphemy by bridging the divide between the sacred and the profane in paradoxical love. One may wonder at how these divergent strands coexist? The answer is: with difficulty.

Sexuality is also intrinsically incarnational. However the temptation is always present that I will deny and repress this incarnational drive. As queer people are constantly reminded, whether by their own experience or the reductionist messages of the wider society that equates us with our sexual acts, the body is a grounding and source of truth. It is my experience that queer sexuality also runs the risk, akin to blasphemy, of treason in attempting to bridge the ancient split between body and spirit.

Finally, in locating my sexuality within the context of my faith, I end here with a short prayer:

> Glory be to God ... for all things counter,
> original, spare, strange; ... Praise Him
> (Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty" 1918)

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Anabaptism in Australia and New Zealand: a snapshot

By Tim Huber

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On a handful of islands separating the Indian and Pacific oceans, Anabaptism's presence is as scattered as the points of land that crest the waves.

The Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand — a network of individuals from a variety of denominations who share interests in a Christ-centered faith, peacemaking and community — gathers far more often electronically than physically.

"We work independently of each other, though we share a common sense of purpose," said network president Doug Sewell of Sydney. "AAANZ sees itself being part of an emerging network of global Anabaptist networks, such as in South Africa and South Korea."

An architect, photographer and author, Sewell is also an elder in his Baptist congregation. The group views "Anabaptist" not as a noun but an adjective. In addition to Baptists it includes Anglicans, house churchers and members of intentional communities.

Members include academic theologians, peace activists and Christians who have lost connections with more established churches.

"Membership within our network is not like membership of a church, which often comes with obligations or at least expectations," he said. "Membership of AAANZ is more about a journey together on a road of discipleship and peacemaking. We are connected by a shared experience, interest and vision."

Groups work to get together throughout the year. American Mennonite author Michael Hardin toured Australia and New Zealand from January to May. In 2011 the AAANZ conference took place in Wellington, N.Z.

"Telechats" bring in speakers for conference call meetings, and online communication tools are often used. At the same time, some members are also able to gather more regularly for "table fellowships" typically punctuated with music, food and discussion.

"We see the shared meal experience as being central to life together, in a similar way to how meals were often central to Jesus' ministry," Sewell said. "Table fellowships are more than just a house-church worship. Communion can be added on either before, during or after the meal if appropriate. There are no prescriptive rules, just good fellowship."

Decades of history

The AAANZ has its beginnings in a radical discipleship movement that swept through Australian evangelical churches in the 1970s.

Through the '80s and '90s, that spark was ignited by interaction with United Kingdom Anabaptist networks and Americans such as former Eastern Mennonite Missions workers Linford and Janet Stutzman in Perth and current Mennonite Mission Network workers Mark and Mary Hurst in Sydney.

Before that, like elsewhere in the British commonwealth, most mission efforts in Australia and New Zealand before World War II came from Great Britain. Mark Hurst said since there were no British Anabaptist churches to send workers, none were sent.

"As to why other English speaking countries didn't, I don't have a good answer for that one," he said. "The churches that did develop in Australia and New Zealand quickly joined the worldwide mission effort and sent mission workers elsewhere in the world.

"A question we got when we first came to Australia was 'Why does Australia need missionaries being sent here?' "

Apathy toward Christianity might be the answer.

Doug Hynd, an AAANZ member since 1995 and lecturer on Christianity and Australian society at St. Mark's National Theological Institute in Canberra, said a large portion of the population is indifferent to traditional religion.

Michael Hardin of Lancaster, Pa., author of The Jesus-Driven Life, speaks with a group from AAANZ on Feb. 4 in Parramatta Park in Sydney. — Photo by Doug Sewell

"Active practicing Christianity is a minority in Australia," he said. "Those who would connect with Anabaptism are a tiny minority of that minority."

At the academic level, Hynd has observed a good deal of awareness of theologians such as John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. However, Sewell noted the Anabaptist story has only recently been understood in wider circles. A still-prevailing notion is that Anabaptism was an aberration of the Reformation.

However, when such misconceptions are overcome, the transition is natural.

"What we often find are those who say when Anabaptism is carefully explained to them, 'I did not realise it, but I think I have been an Anabaptist for a long while but didn't know it until now.' " Sewell said. "Anabaptism has given people a connection with a heritage of discipleship."

Looking at Australia's history, it would appear a natural fit for many of Anabaptism's tenets.

"Australia's convict ancestry has partly shaped the national egalitarian values of 'mateship' and giving someone a 'fair go,' as well as a disrespect for authority, pomp and ceremony," Sewell said. "You would think the dissident character of Jesus, who was crucified amongst thieves and called people to take up their cross, should ring bells for Australians. Unfortunately, the traditional church in Australia has not yet fully grasped these powerful connections."

Diverse Anabaptism

Just as the Australian landscape varies dramatically from the Great Barrier Reef to the dusty "outback," the region is also home to a spectrum of Anabaptist expressions.

The Hutterite Rocky Cape Christian Community calls the island of Tasmania home. Very small Old Order pockets are also located both there and on the big island. The Montezuma Amish Mennonite Church in George sponsors the Australian Christian Brotherhood, which has established a Beachy Amish fellowship in Queensland and operates a literature distribution program.

New South Wales is home to three Bruderhof Communities — at Armidale House, Danthonia and Inverell.

New South Wales is also home to Mennonite Church of Hope in Marmong Point north of Sydney.

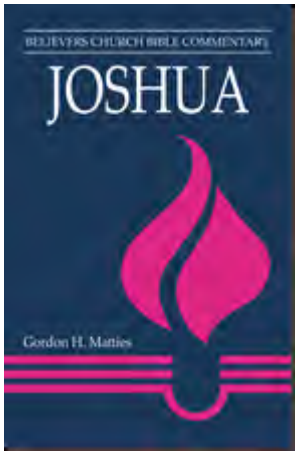
Its longtime leaders are Foppe and Aaltje Brouwer, who grew up in Mennonite households in the Netherlands and immigrated to Australia in the 1950s. They gave their lives to Christ during a 1959 Billy Graham crusade in Australia, and by 1978 their congregation became a reality.

According to Brouwer, his is the only Mennonite congregation recognized by the Australian government.

In a February news release from Mennonite World Conference, the congregation's treasurer, Anne McQueen, reported that the church is requesting prayer and help in its search for a new pastor. Foppe Brouwer is 82, and both he and his wife are in failing health.

"We are a small congregation with a passion for Christ," wrote McQueen. "We see the potential that our Lord Jesus Christ can do within the community and the area around our church. We believe that God wants us to continue, but we need a new pastor for leadership, teaching and outreach ministry for the church to grow and continue."

Reviews



Believers Church Bible Commentary Series: Joshua, Gordon Matties, Herald Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Nathan Willis

Matties prefaces his commentary on the book of Joshua with a statement: 'In an age of fear and insecurity, in which ethnic nationalisms continue to give rise to conflict and war, we dare not avoid critical engagement with biblical texts that have been used to justify colonialism, conquest, occupation, and ethnic cleansing'.

With a brave and honest recognition of the historical legacy of this biblical book, Matties explores the biblical text of Joshua and takes the reader to places of reflection on the Holocaust, popular culture (VeggieTales, The Lord of the Rings and Bob Dylan rate a mention) and a serious consideration in light of the international genocide law. He argues that 'in a time of religious justification for terrorism and counterterrorism, Joshua may be a book for our time'. For Matties, 'at its heart, the book of Joshua is concerned with leadership and political community, concerns that become ever more pressing in our time as ethnic nationalisms and corporate interests vie for human loyalty, and as disenfranchised groups exert their will against either powerful minorities or over-powering imperialisms'.

Eschewing the temptation to 'perform a textectomy' on the book of Joshua, Matties instead is content to enter into 'a difficult conversation with the text, even an argument with it'. For each passage of the text, Matties considers it in light of the biblical context and the life of the church. The volume concludes with a collection of relevant essays.

It is in these essays that the questions that many readers may ask find the author's response. Questions such as: "What about the genocide and conquest?" and "How does that fit into a nonviolent Christianity?" In relation to the former question, Matties outlines the historical context of the ancient Near East.

Matties explains, 'Biblical history writing, like all history writing, reflects a point of view shaped by cultural, theological or ideological impulses'. He compares the narrative in Joshua with similar ancient conquest accounts and concludes that the Israelite experience is no different as a conquest account that incorporates the ancient near eastern theological aspects of warfare. Yet he concludes that 'the book of Joshua is itself not a conquest account' and that 'the conquest accounts in the book of Joshua become incorporated into a larger conversation about peoplehood, attentiveness to God's instruction, idolatry, and the ultimate transformation of imperial power and the militarism by which it is sustained'.

Matties considers the concept of conquest in light of the New Testament, and in particular Jesus' beatitude in Matt 5:5, "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth", and suggests that 'something odd has happened to the conquest/land motif on its journey through the ancient world into postbiblical Judaism and the NT writings' and concludes that on the basis of texts such as John 16:33, 'Jesus has conquered the entire world...through suffering and martyrdom'.

To this reviewer's mind, this is an example of the difficult conversation with the text, the argument, that Matties warned us of. How do we, in 2012 Australia and New Zealand, with a collective memory of relatively recent atrocities such as Rwanda, Cambodia and Yugoslavia understand the message of the book of Joshua? Whilst there is some resolution in considering the book of Joshua in light of his namesake, Jesus, I am more convinced that the difficult conversation is apparent for the same reason that the difficult circumstances surround a conversation of concepts of conquest and genocide in our time. If we are wise: we reflect, we pause, we ask why, we consider our humanity, we are outraged, he hope for better, we are indeed caused to breathe a collective breath. Pause. How did that just happen? Who are we as humans? How are we capable of doing that to each other? What narrative and/or power drove us to that course of action? Of course, it must be recognised that in asking such questions, the question of the divine endorsement of such acts remains unresolved.

As an aid worker in Burma/Myanmar during the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, I saw first-hand what happens when people motivated by power and racism deny aid to those who need it most. The 'day in court' is yet to come in relation to those who denied aid and in many ways facilitated what seems to me 'genocide by neglect'. Yet the book of Joshua, and this commentary offer a reading of Scripture that takes our response to such

atrocities from the arena of retributive justice to one of restorative justice.

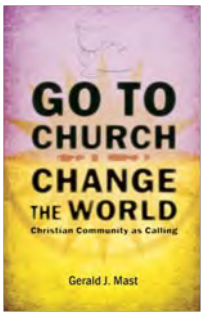
Matties moves from considerations of conquest to considerations of treaty, covenant and love. He see this 'essence of covenant' as a thread between the Testaments that 'testify to God's creating a community whose calling is to embody an alternative way of being in the world, and to point to God's dream of restoring, reconciling, and healing all of creation'.

Prior to my experience in Cyclone Nargis, I stood in churches in Thai refugee camps on the Thai/Burma border on multiple occasions preaching a narrative that "God is on your side" and "Fight for the land that God has given you" that "You will find victory just as Joshua found victory and lead the people into the promised land". Within a context of ethnic nationalism and disputes over valuable land and natural resources, these words, this rhetoric, was applauded and acceptable. Yet now, a number of years later, I reflect on those words with deep, heart-wrenching, regret. Regret, because in my opinion, to understand God, and the mission of God, as a conquest is to misunderstand the nature of God and the purpose of God in covenant, grace, community and love.

Although helpful as a reference for those engaging a text for the purpose of delivering a sermon or homily, Matties draws on Eugene's Petersons advice where he has said: 'I recommend reading commentaries in the same way we read novels, from beginning to end, skipping nothing'. Whilst some commentaries may not lend the reader to such an approach, Matties' work does and it is an engaging commentary that breathes ethical, sociological and theological perspective into readings of the book of Joshua.

Go to Church, Change the World: Christian Community as Calling by Gerald J Mast, Herald Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Doug Hynd



A commonly expressed view is that "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian", or even "You don't have to go to church to be spiritual". We have in this culturally normative and usually unchallenged response, an ongoing reaction to the long experience of Christendom in which to go to church was all that was required because everyone was a Christian by virtue of the political settlement. Because going to church was a political requirement and later a social norm, now that these requirements are gone and "religion" has been privatised it is assumed that there is no need for any communal expression of faith. Challenging that commonplace, or even the assumptions underlying it is indeed a big ask because it tends to bring into play the memories of that political and social compulsion.

In tackling this issue, Mast lays out his Anabaptist cards on the table in the first chapter. Jesus cannot be possessed or accepted. Jesus can only be followed as he moves through not only our history, but also the history of the world. That is, we are called to the way of discipleship that has profound social implications. "The truth of Jesus Christ incarnate is a social truth not a disembodied fact."(p.31) Discipleship is not about an individual privatised spiritual quest.

But that is not the end of the challenge that this book offers. Gerald Mast goes on to make the more apparently outrageous, and counterintuitive claim that attendance at church is about changing the world. The call to be a church is the call to be a community that is learning a different identity from that which a consumer culture is seeking to form us into. We are called to become part of a confrontational community of hope that distances itself from the world of empire and violence to witness to the coming of God's peaceable kingdom.

This is a book that is accessible, recounting stories and anecdotes that earths the discussion and referring to Scripture to make its case. Mast covers all the ground that you might expect from a conventional evangelical account: reading scripture, baptism, giving and worship. It is, however, different in the direction it takes us. Here we have an account that does not reduce everything to a pious religiosity distant from the world in which we actually live. Mast's account is grounded in actual social and economic relationships. It points us to a countercultural community of discipleship which has substantial implications for social and economic life - what and how we consume, decision making, and engaging in seeking the welfare of society.

According to Mast, the call to discipleship is a call to participate in a community and how that community lives out its discipleship matters for the shape the world takes.

The book is structured to encourage its use in study groups with discussion questions for each chapter. Given that many of the books used in churches in Australia are of US origin and assume that cultural and social context I have decided to not worry about my disclaimer about the limitations of the book for those reasons. The case Mast is arguing is sufficiently challenging to make that particular difference fairly irrelevant.

Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead by Sara Miles (Jossey-Bass, 2010) .

Reviewed by Doug Hynd

The story of a conversion, told in first person is a genre largely owned by evangelicals. The focus on an encounter with Jesus has also been typical of the genre. There are exceptions - Augustine's *Confessions* comes to mind—but at the level of popular Christian culture, it holds true.

Sara Miles books might seem on first glance to fit into the evangelical frame - she experienced a striking conversion, she is pretty hung up on Jesus and indeed uses the term 'Jesus freak' as the title of her second book. At this point, however, the tracks diverge and a variety of both evangelical and Episcopalian sacred cows seem to have been ignored by the Spirit along the way, if not directly slaughtered, in the account that she provides us.

The starting point of her conversion came through wandering in to an Episcopal church in San Francisco out of sheer curiosity and receiving communion simply because she happened to be there. It was not a matter of responding to the preaching of the word, the revivalist, altar call sermon, the typical pattern for evangelicals. It all happened through eating a piece of bread. Are we moving into Anglo-Catholic territory here?

Well no as it happens. Indeed, the whole episode is highly irregular in terms of that tradition from start to finish. She should not have received communion, as someone who had not been baptised. According to the rules, what Miles experienced - a radical refocussing of her life—shouldn't have happened because she would not have received communion at all.

And then to raise the improbability level a couple of notches there is Miles herself, a lesbian, left wing journalist and war correspondent, living in a committed relationship with a female partner, and parenting her daughter from a failed marriage.

What Miles discovered as she engaged with the church community of St Gregory of Nyassa was a faith that centred on real food real hunger and real bodies. Her story, of how she experienced her conversion and what it led her to do in the opening up of a food pantry at the church, is written with honesty, vigour, humour and a reflective awareness of how her life was being changed.

As I said there is plenty here to disturb those of us who come from an evangelical tradition and understand the importance of conversion. The question Miles' story raises is whether what we expect from conversion has more to do with the process of conformity to a certain account of middle class conventional morality?

For those of a liberal theological persuasion, Miles' account seems to yield too much ground to a fundamentalist/ evangelical style at a time in the United States when that theological stance is closely associated with the political right. Miles' account of feeding people through the food pantry is traced out in strongly theological and ecclesiological terms rather than in a conventional framework of social justice and subverts the church's conformity to the institutional culture of bureaucratised helping agencies.

Secularists will be aghast that one of their own who knows why intelligent people should be atheists has strayed so far from the path of righteousness.

Miles is passionate about the church as 'event', while sitting lightly on its attempt to control the workings of the Spirit. Those committed to the church as institution will be aghast at her free-wheeling, passionate commitment to discipleship and her open, inclusive approach to the sharing of the sacraments. She raises a number of theological and ecclesiological issues that are critical as we move beyond Christendom. The case Miles is arguing is that communion should be an open meal that witnesses to the catholicity and inclusiveness of Jesus' life and ministry, that it is evangelical in character, and that baptism should come at the point at which people take on the responsibility of committing themselves publicly to the path of discipleship.

She is also passionate about food and cooking. "Foodies" will find much in this story to enjoy, including her accounts of her early years working in restaurants. She celebrates food and the bodies of the poor and broken who become part of the community that runs the food pantry at St Gregory's. Without making the point in theological terms, she puts her finger on one of the deepest difficulties of the Christian community - that, against the deepest logic of the incarnation, its own founding story, the church has retained a residual gnosticism which is uneasy with the body and the goodness of the created order.

Miles testimony of conversion through food and through remembering the body of Christ represents, even if indirectly, a powerful challenge to that residual, unidentified gnosticism. For that at least I would want to unreservedly thank her.

For the rest of the disturbance of my evangelical sensibilities, I will have to accept that as part of my own ongoing conversion, and acknowledge it as a price well worth paying for the encouragement I have received from Miles' lively account of a very radical conversion.

Contributor Profiles

Shane Fenwick is a 20 year old studying psychology at Macquarie University, inspired by the witness of the Anabaptists, and the way in which they have embodied non-violent, Christ-centred discipleship. His joint blog is kingdompraxis.wordpress.com, email Fenwickinho@hotmail.com.

David Griffin, from Vincentia, is a Baptist minister on study leave, pursuing a ThD in philosophy and ethics, with special interest in Anabaptist ethics. Currently a swim teacher and triathlete.

Tim Huber is editor of the Mennonite World Review, www.mennoworld.org, "an independent news source serving Mennonites and the global Anabaptist movement".

Mark Hurst is one of the pastoral/missional workers for AAANZ and co-pastor at Avalon Baptist Peace Memorial Church in Sydney. He shares both positions (and the rest of life) with Mary.

Doug Hynd is a retired public servant who is now working on a PhD on the relationship between the Federal Government and church related agencies in delivering community services.

Danny Klopovic is a long-time AAANZ member from Melbourne.

Andreana Reale is currently exploring church ministry at Collins Street Baptist Church. She is also involved in the community connected with Urban Seed, and is a student of theology.

Nathan Willis is married to Sandie and together they have four children. A registered nurse and an aid worker, he has recently completed postgraduate studies in ministry and will complete a law degree at the end of year.

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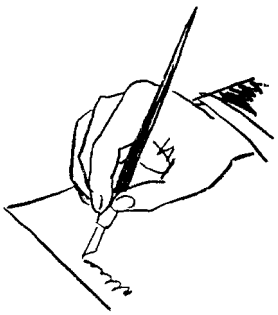

Submissions are welcome. To contribute, please send your piece to the editor, Nathan Hobby, nathanhobby@gmail.com. Submissions should be in Microsoft Word (any version) or Rich Text Format. Photos or illustrations are helpful. Please provide some brief notes for a profile on you—your city, your website, perhaps your interest in Anabaptism.

For referencing please use in-text style, with author, date and page number in brackets, followed by a bibliography at the end. **Please don't use endnotes or footnotes.**

The theme of issue 54 is Jesus. The deadline is 9 August 2012.

Non-themed submissions are always welcome too.

How to... JOIN

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

Membership enables you to be connected to others in the network and join tele-chats with guest speakers from your own phone. You will also receive the quarterly prayer and contact calendar.

There is no membership fee, but we encourage you to contribute to the association and the work of our staffworkers, Mark and Mary Hurst.