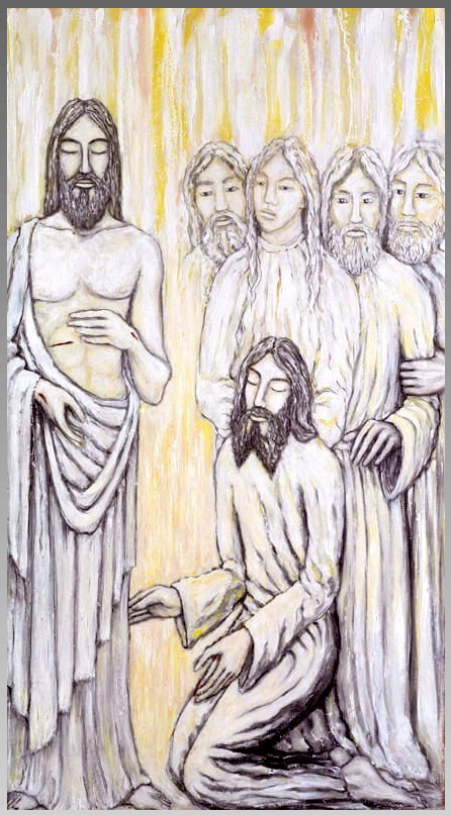
ON THE ROAD

Journal of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand
No. 54, December 2012



Jesus

is the centre of our faith

Contents

OTR 54, December 2012

Cover painting: Jesus Appears to Thomas (St John Passion - 13) by Jacek Andrzej Rossakiewicz. From Wikimedia Commons.

From the Editor

Nathan Hobby

The theme of this issue is the first in a series of three covering the essentials of Anabaptism, the three parts of the AAANZ Vision statement:

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

I chose these as themes to ensure, in amongst more topical issues of OTR, we are properly covering the essentials. Of course, these three themes tend to emerge in our engagement with any topic. It is an appropriate coincidence that the centrality of Jesus is the theme of this issue right before the 2013 AAANZ Conference on relating to other religions, reminding us of the challenge of respectful, reconciling dialogue which avoids pluralism.

Putting Jesus at the centre of our faith is a radical move, theologically, and Bruce Hamill writes of a conversation he and in Kristin Jack have begun in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand toward an Anabaptist account of salvation. More biographical angles on the challenge are offered by Chris Summerfield and me, along with some poems on the theme from Melissa Weaver. It's Chris's welcome second appearance in OTR (first was in OTR50); his blog, achurchlessfaith.blogspot.com, is a fascinating account of—among many things—sticking with church when it hurts, and I am frequently challenged by his creative thinking.

This issue also features reviews of two significant new books by AAANZ members - Chris Marshall's *Compassionate Justice* and Dave Andrews' *Down Under*. Doug Hynd and Mark Hurst have contributed quite complementary reviews on *Compassionate Justice*, and the book is important enough to justify including both perspectives. As well as Eddie Ozols' review, this issue features an extract from Dave's book on the breakdown of community.

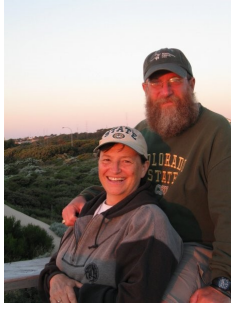
The reviews section finishes with two reviews on books relevant to January's AAANZ Conference.

OTR 55, due in autumn, will focus on the conference theme, before we return to the AAANZ Vision for OTR 56.

The view from Ephesians 4

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

We showed a film about Afghanistan called *The Garden At The End of the World* at our local Baptist church on Sunday evening. The film's website describes it as "a film that is both a documentary and a travelogue of a journey through a ruined land. It is stark in its contrasts of the impacts of war with the everyday lives of people trying to create new lives, of ruined city and the bare beauty of the mountains, of the conditions in the country and the efforts of one woman small of stature but big of goodness in doing her small part to put things right."



We had Gary Caganoff, the filmmaker, there as well as Mahboba Rawi, one of the women featured in the film. *The Garden at the End of the World* was honoured with the joint WAAC / SIGNIS Human Rights Award for 2010. The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), and SIGNIS (the World Catholic Association of Communication) awarded the film "for its rare sensitivity in the portrayal of human rights issues of ordinary people."

When Gary introduced the film in our Baptist congregation he said there is something about this film that crosses faith and cultural lines. "I am a Jewish filmmaker, with Buddhist leanings, who made a film with an internationally recognised permaculturalist who is Quaker, that features the work of a Muslim woman and her community. The film was given a Human Rights Award from two Christian organisations - one Protestant and one Catholic."

Brian McLaren writes in his new book about Christian identity in a multi-faith world that "Christianity has carried on a long affair with empire and colonialism, and as a result, has picked up the imperial auto-immune disease of 'hostility to the other.'"

McLaren continues, "Religious communities often take a short-cut to building a strong group identity — by defining themselves in opposition to others. Muslims, atheists and gays are high profile 'others' which can be scapegoated to build a strong 'Christian' identity. On top of that, Christians have been taught to see in 'us vs. them' terms for centuries, and it will take time to reorient faithful people in a new direction — 'us with them,' working for the common good." (www.patheos.com/blogs/brianmclaren/2012/10/why-were-leaving-church-a-report-from-the-nones/)

The film we showed demonstrates that issues of war, poverty, and gender discrimination are human problems that need to be addressed by all of us – no matter our faith (or lack of faith). We need to get over feelings of "them and us" and realise these issues are about "us".

The question of how we live as neighbours in a multi-faith world will be our theme for the 2013 AAANZ Conference held in Sydney (www.anabaptist.asn.au/index.php?type=page&ID=3756). Please join us as we discover how to better work for the common good – in Australia, New Zealand, Afghanistan, and around the world.

Missing Jesus

President's Report

Doug Sewell, AAANZ President

Both the Nicene and Apostles creeds fail on one major point. They omit Jesus. One comma in the Apostles Creed separates the origin of Christ's life; *'Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,'* from his demise: *'suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.'*

Almost the entire life of Jesus, his encounters, relationships, mission and journey have been skipped over and bypassed as if they were irrelevant to his primary theological soteriological purpose: begotten by God to redeem humanity. The church calendar hastens too quickly from Christmas to Easter.

Imagine then what it would be like if on reading a good novel you were to discover the entire middle section was missing. You would have to make the story up yourself. My children used to get very annoyed with me when I teased them with a truncated form of bedtime story that went... 'Once upon a time, and they lived happily ever after!' They complained and begged me to fill in the missing storyline.

The creeds were largely formulated in the fourth century to defend dominant Trinitarian beliefs against prevalent Gnosticism and Marcion dualism. Yet ironically the creeds have bound orthodoxy to a set of dogma that are devoid of the transformative Jesus story, a story which gives life and has meaning and relevance to modern culture.

The journey of "the way" that Jesus lived, to 'take up one's cross' that he spoke about and the "abundant life" that he invited his followers to seek are at the heart of his message. Without an encounter with the radical Jesus his real story is incomplete and Christ crucified becomes a question for theological constructs or an icon of religious piety.

This issue of *On The Road* looks at Jesus. The AAANZ core statement of values reads like this:

> Jesus is the focal point of God's revelation. He is all of Example, Teacher, Friend, Redeemer, Lord and even more. He is the source and central reference point for faith and lifestyle, and for an understanding of church that is engaged with society. To follow Jesus is to also worship him.

What resonates most for me is the part that says; "He is all of...and even more." I want to follow a Jesus who is neither limited by my imagination nor governed by my projection of what I want Jesus to be like.

Jesus is somewhat of an enigma. His humanity is all too real, yet he transcends my understanding of humanity. He refuses the titles given to him by his followers, yet he accepts the love of those who adore him. He crosses over cultural and religious barriers freely and liberates the oppressed and heals the broken hearted. He faces the trauma of the violence done to him and offers forgiveness in return.

Jesus' understanding of his God as a loving father, Abba, was unique in his time. He shows how love of both Abba and neighbour, as well as forgiveness, justice and reconciliation are his way. He is no ordinary man. He is someone who I want to worship, yet he does not want my worship, but rather my willingness to follow where I'm afraid to go.

AAANZ CONFERENCE

From Pieces to Peace

More Than Just Neighbours In a Multifaith World: a conference about peace building between different faiths & cultures.

Australia Day weekend 25th to 28th January 2013.

Come for the whole weekend or just for the day.

Jesus calls for followers who will be merciful neighbours, loving others as we love ourselves. In OZ and NZ today many of our neighbours are Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim or people with no defined faith. How are we at being neighbours to so many who are so different from ourselves? We'd also like the challenge of going beyond being merely neighbourly and like Jesus embody the love of neighbour as the ground for reconciliation... which is also the foundation for peace.

Speakers

Dave Andrews (The Waiters' Union)

Jarrod McKenna (World Vision Australia)

Kyinzom Tsering (Australia Tibet Council)

Matt Anslow (TEAR Australia)

Nora Amath (Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of All Humanity)

Rabbi Zalman Kastel (Together For Humanity)

Pastor Ray Minniecon - Douwaburra Aboriginal tribe (Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions)

Location

Long Point Conference Centre and Retreat near Ingleburn is 45 km south west of Sydney CBD. A bushland setting on the Georges River, air-conditioned rooms, swimming pool, children's playground and a café.

Photos and info on centre - see: http://www.longpoint.org.au/

Program, Cost and Registration

Go to: www.anabaptist.asn.au/index.php?type=page&ID=3756

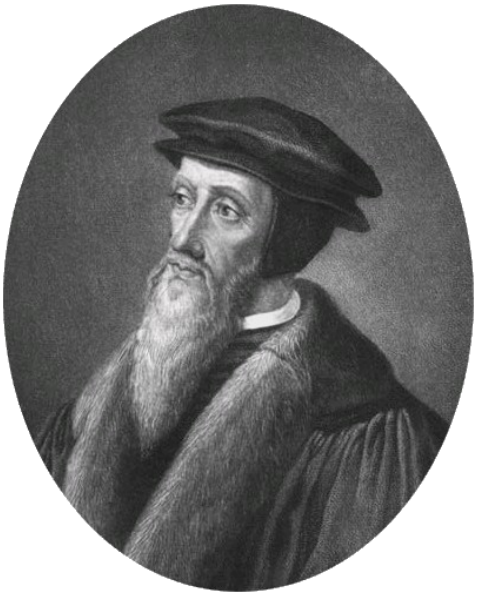
Email enquires to: aaanz.conference@gmail.com

A God like Jesus

An Anabaptist-Reformed conversation

Bruce Hamill

A month ago my friend Kristen Jack and I wrote a pamphlet on "Presbyterian and Neo-Anabaptist?" We are both part of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, however we share an Anabaptist perspective and theology. We wanted to engage our Presbyterian friends in a conversation.



Jean Calvin, key figure in the Reformed tradition, and no fan of the Anabaptists.

One of the deep issues dragging the Presbyterian Church down for many years is a kind of bi-polar battle for domination of the denomination – the battle between liberals and evangelicals. One of the gifts of the Anabaptist movement to this unfortunate situation is that it has the potential to represent a theological third way.

In the pamphlet we hint at the radical challenge that the Anabaptist tradition offers to the Presbyterian tradition however to establish a space for dialogue we began by emphasising what we see as the strengths which each tradition has to offer the other.

> From the Anabaptist tradition: peace making; non-violence; Christian community; discipleship; solidarity with the persecuted and oppressed (rather than the powerful); and a determinedly Christ-centred/gospel centred way of reading the Bible. And from the Presbyterian tradition: a disciplined attention to all of Scripture; a confidence in the sovereignty of God; an egalitarian approach to our common life in the Spirit, and a willingness to engage with the state and wider society (albeit from a significant point of difference).

However, after a paragraph on each of the key Anabaptist themes of pacifism, communal life, and discipleship we launched into a more critical engagement with the reformed tradition (as it has been shaped by Christendom) in order to highlight how we see Anabaptism as a serious alternative to the dominant streams of Protestantism. I will quote this slightly denser section in full:

> It is helpful to see these things [the Anabaptist distinctives] in context. The fact that this vision for peacemaking and community is so distinctive is a sad commentary on the history of the church. In forming an alliance with the power of the state (and of the sword) in the 4th century and thus establishing what we call Christendom, the followers of Jesus gave in to the temptation which Jesus had resisted. The logic of 'an eye for an eye' was back and soon theologians found ways both to justify war and also to project the same violence and retributive logic onto God. Jesus had to die, they said, not to reconcile us to God and one another (as the New Testament teaches) but to reconcile an angry or offended God to us. God could not, they argued, forgive without retribution. Justice, they believed, must be retributive and the system of exchange (an eye for an eye) must be maintained (contra Jesus' own life and teaching). Jesus must be punished (or at least give his life into the system of exchange) in order for us to avoid punishment. This was the dominant theology of Christendom in both its Protestant and Catholic forms (since the 11th century and Anselm, but emerging as early as the 5thcentury). For Presbyterians it is worth noting that John Calvin developed a specifically violent version of this retributive account of salvation. For Calvin and for the evangelical tradition which draws so heavily upon him, God saves us by giving Jesus the death penalty (penal substitution).
>
> Today we live in the ruins of Christendom. Its demise finds us with mixed feelings as a church. Some of us look back in nostalgia for

> our previous status and power while others seek to respond to a new missional situation. However, the theologies and practices of Christendom live on in us. Within this context a new interest in the Anabaptist tradition is emerging. During the reformation it was the Anabaptist churches who rejected Christendom precisely because they followed Jesus in rejecting the sword. Of course, the Anabaptist tradition was not always successful in its attempt to be true to these insights, however their practice and their theology represent for many an incomplete project and a calling which needs to be continued.

Basically the argument is that if we are going to take seriously, as Anabaptists claim to do, Jesus own radical rejection of the lex tallionis (eye for an eye) we will be need to challenge some of the core ideas of western Christianity. In particular, we will challenge the notion that Jesus brings a salvation that involves pacifying a God bound into a system of exchange or retribution.

In the background to these accounts of salvation is the assumption that justice is retributive. And it is this assumption that Anabaptists like Chris Marshall and Darrin Belousek are beginning to question powerfully. If debts cannot be forgiven (in the tradition of Jubilee) and if crimes must be punished according to some kind of measured reciprocity then we need to wonder whether God really is like Jesus. At that point the resurrection itself, rather than being THE act of forgiveness has become the after-effect of an otherworldly transaction. And the cross, although an historical event, is primarily a transcendental moment within the divine life.

If on the other hand the resurrection is the giving-again of Jesus in the face of his rejection, to those who rejected him according to a universal process of scapegoating violence, then the founding event of Christian faith is of another order altogether to an act of retributive justice. As the opposite of a response-in-kind it interrupts the culture and logic of exchange in a way that restores relationship. It is non-retributive justification, which, by its very character, is transformative of human existence. In giving Jesus again, God is acting precisely as Jesus expects him to (fears of God-forsakenness notwithstanding) and precisely as no one, even his disciples expect. The resurrection is an apocalyptic event par excellence – it interrupts the human condition from beyond all our possibilities.

Something like this, it seems to me, might be a good place to start thinking about an Anabaptist account of salvation. When we gathered at the Presbyterian Assembly to discuss Anabaptist matters the first question we were asked was 'What does an Anabaptist soteriology look like?' It strikes me that this is an important question which is easy to dismiss too lightly. It is one thing to critique the Western and Reformed traditions, and another thing to grapple with the important issues they raise. The Anabaptist emphasis on what we do for Jesus – follow, be reconciled and make-peace, share our life in community etc – should not be a way of avoiding the question of what Jesus does for us. Robert Friedmann, in a historical discussion of Anabaptist theology makes the following observations:

> … "soteriology" traditionally the very nucleus of all theology, is not and cannot be a major theme in Anabaptist thought. The concern as to "how to escape eternal damnation," or in Luther's terms, "how to find a gracious God," was certainly not a major concern of the Anabaptists… they did not start with a crushing awareness of being lost sinners but began rather with the glorious experience of regeneration or spiritual rebirth… [t]herefore, the question of "salvation" naturally dropped into the background and was dealt with casually.

The striking thing here is that it is assumed that Luther and the magisterial reformers have rights on defining the notion of salvation – and defined in their terms the question becomes largely irrelevant to Anabaptists. On the other hand if we were to take seriously (as Barth does) that God is like Jesus and also take seriously (as Girard does) that we humans are like those who couldn't follow him to his cross but abandoned him, denied him and joined together to crucify him, then its "game on" for Anabaptist soteriology. What's more the Pauline scholars (Michael Gorman, Douglas Campbell, John Barclay, Tom Wright) and not just the Jesus scholars are leading the way on this.

In conclusion then, I note that this is an exciting time for Anabaptist soteriology. The aforementioned scholars have left the soteriological accounts of the magisterial reformers in tatters. It is an opportunity to renew our connections with the pre-Constantinian fathers like Irenaeus and continue to develop a transformational account of salvation rather than one abstracted from both our history and the history of Jesus. On this account, resurrection and crucifixion will inseparably constitute the salvation of God for us. What's more, the non-violence of both the Father and the Son which lies at the centre of Anabaptist faith will come clearly to view when the forgiveness of the resurrection is linked specifically to the violence of the crucifixion as the ultimate expression of our fallen social condition.

Jesus is the centre of my faith. Or, Why I should stop wasting my time and be more like my wife.

Chris Summerfield

Ask me if Jesus is the centre of my faith and I'll say a resounding "yes!" If you observe my life you'll see a different reality. In reality the Bible is often the centre of my faith. The Bible is what sermons get preached from, it's what gets quoted to substantiate a position on almost everything apart which footy team I should to follow. If you come out of a more evangelical tradition like me, as long as someone could pull out a Bible verse or two to substantiate their position then there was no need to ask further questions. If, on the other hand, we ever heard someone say 'Jesus was nice, so let's do something that's nice,' we would recoil at what we perceived as a very wishy-washy theological basis for any idea or activity.

Of course things weren't always as simple as quoting one proof text. Older texts could always be 'trumped' by newer ones. For example, if anyone ever suggested that we should adopt Old Testament purity laws. Then we could deliver an avalanche of counter 'proof texts' particularly from Paul. Not that this ever happened, but we were ready in case it did.

Now, my theology is far less evangelical than it used to be. If anyone asks me why I believe in gender equality, why I'm gay affirming, or why I believe that we should not repeat Ezra's ethnic cleansing I can explain and, like a good evangelical, explain from the Bible. It might sometimes mean a bit of a theological workout, looking at the meaning of original Greek words and the context of the original passage, but we could get there.

On the other hand if anyone was to ask my wife these same questions she'd probably shrug her shoulders and say 'ask Chris'. I suspect she just can't be bothered with all my pharisaic like theological gymnastics just to get to a position to which she already knows in her heart to be true. She knows it to be true because she's spent a life time trying to be like Jesus, rather than me who has spent a life time trying to wrestle with scripture. If we walk in the city she takes the cash. If I get asked by a homeless person for some money I need ten minutes to work out what the best thing to do is. She'll just hand over the cash. She just has a more natural ability to embody Jesus than me. She spent the first twenty five years of her life listening to sermons on why it was important to submit to your husband and spent them single because she refused to date anyone who believed that. Despite what everyone else said she just knew that sort of dominate/subordinate relationship didn't line up with who Jesus was.

Recently, I heard a great talk explaining how the feeding of the 4000 parallels with Joshua's conquest of Jericho. (It's not as farfetched as it sounds). Anyway, just as I was about to tell my wife about it, I realised she didn't need some convoluted explanation about why we shouldn't kill thousands of innocent people and take their land from them. Of course, she wouldn't even think that could ever be justified. All it took was for her to once read Jesus saying 'you've heard it said, but I say...' for her to know the right answer, the Jesus answer, is always the compassionate answer. As exciting as my theological discovery was I couldn't help but think maybe I should make Jesus the centre of my faith and not the Bible. Maybe I should stop wasting my time and be more like my wife.

'Jesus is the centre of our faith': some questions

Nathan Hobby

Inevitably, we put something at the centre of our faith. Jesus, in the complexity of his life and teaching, death and resurrection, is the right choice, surely, rather than an inerrant Bible, a model of atonement or an abstract principle like liberation – or even non-violence. (Yet I would suggest the 'Trinity' is an alternative which needs to be considered.) But putting Jesus at the centre troubles me, at this point in my life, in at least three ways.

*

Firstly, do we ever make Jesus the centre of our faith?

Ten years ago, trying to live the 'politics of Jesus' meant for me, among a number of things, a determination to swim against the stream and never take out a mortgage. Now, at thirty-one, I have a mortgage. I was able to live back then with at least a taste of the apocalyptic fervour that surely carried along the earliest Jesus movement. In the years since, I've felt worn down by the compromises life demands.

I remember sharing John Yoder's indignation in *The Politics of Jesus* at the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount which reads it as a list of impossibles, designed to remind us of our sinfulness and our inability to live up to God's standards, throwing us back on God's mercy. No, Yoder insists – Jesus calls us to holiness, the narrow path, the way of the cross.

I still think Yoder was right, but I feel dissatisfied. The sensitive and the honest will always perceive how far short they fail; the self-congratulatory – among them, some radicals – will feel they're living it. The point I'm making is Sunday-School obvious, in one sense – 'nobody's perfect this side of heaven' – but it is a more painful one than that for me. It is a terrible suspicion that Anabaptists claim the politics of Jesus more often than we practice them. It is also a weary sense that it is not simply a matter of determination and prayer as I felt ten years ago.

Secondly, do Anabaptists reduce Jesus to 'nonviolence'?

Sometimes I think we do, and it's nearly as much of a mistake as reducing Jesus to a substitutionary death and claiming Jesus is your centre. Jesus is so much complex than any theme or concept.

Because nonviolence is an essential component of the gospel missed by most of Christianity, we emphasise it. This is a necessary and welcome corrective. But it can't be understood in isolation from the rest of Jesus. Nonviolence is not just a strategy or a value; it's part of an eschatological vision which the church is meant to embody to show the rest of the world the kingdom.

Thirdly, what are we to do with the fact that Jesus speaks so much of judgement and hell?

One of the attractions of putting Jesus at the centre of our faith is that it is a viable approach to the more disturbing sections of the Bible, such as God's command to the Israelites to slaughter the Canaanites. Jesus never draws on this story, and the God he reveals is one who commands us to love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us. It is a God of exile and marginality, rather than conquest.

Yet while Jesus did not, in one part of John, come into the world to condemn it but to save it, Jesus was also constantly warning his people about the judgement which was coming, a great reversal of fortune. Sometimes he is talking about the judgement of Israel, its impending fall; but other times he is talking, surely, about the fate of individuals in the Final Judgement. The judgement was going to be surprising – it was, perhaps, people like the good Samaritan who were going to come out okay and the hypocritical Pharisee who was going to be condemned – but it *was* going to be happen. If we are to take Jesus seriously, it *is* going to happen.

Rob Bell writes in *Love Wins* that we should be glad that judgement is coming, that it is the only way to set things right. He has a point. But does setting things right require separating some of us from God forever?

*

All of this is to say, in another way, that it is just as well that Jesus disturbs us, even and especially peace-loving Anabaptists. Is Jesus the Jesus we would invent? Probably not, and that is why we need to make him – and not our simplification of him - the centre.

Poems

Melissa Weaver

I Have No Poems About Jesus

I realize this paging through my pittance of black pixels
strewn across white pages in hope
that some will take root.

I read of redemption, communion, the kingdom;
there is Moses, my father; no Rabbi in sight.

The New Jerusalem seems safer,
stained glass and sand sufficient.
No need to touch nail holes,
struggle to name the One
who offers flesh as food,
who tells me I must hate
the one who bore me
but who lets whores
kiss his feet before
he dies.

I have no place to lay His head.

I touch the far hem of His garment for healing.
To get closer means His smell might
mingle with mine.

Palm Sunday

I.
There are times when I wish "Your Kingdom come"
could come a little faster,
a little cleaner,
less *some assembly required;*
more like the pre-made, new magazine houses
my father swears will never last.
Their three month gestations still seem attractive.
I'd like your new city with glittering pillars,
not these bricks thrown through windows now living-room glass.

II.
At the end of the day, Taequon laughed, joked:
"Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, all those people swing from trees."
Ugliness waltzed in on the lips of a black child
mouthing words that would have burned
the ears of his grandfather.
He didn't agree with my "overreaction;"
left a wake of paper
lying blue-veined on linoleum.

Earlier my lips had done their own dancing:
How I'd seen the new substitute
like a child between shelves.
Reading sci-fi, he was glasses and mouse-brown shirt.
All those people swing from trees.

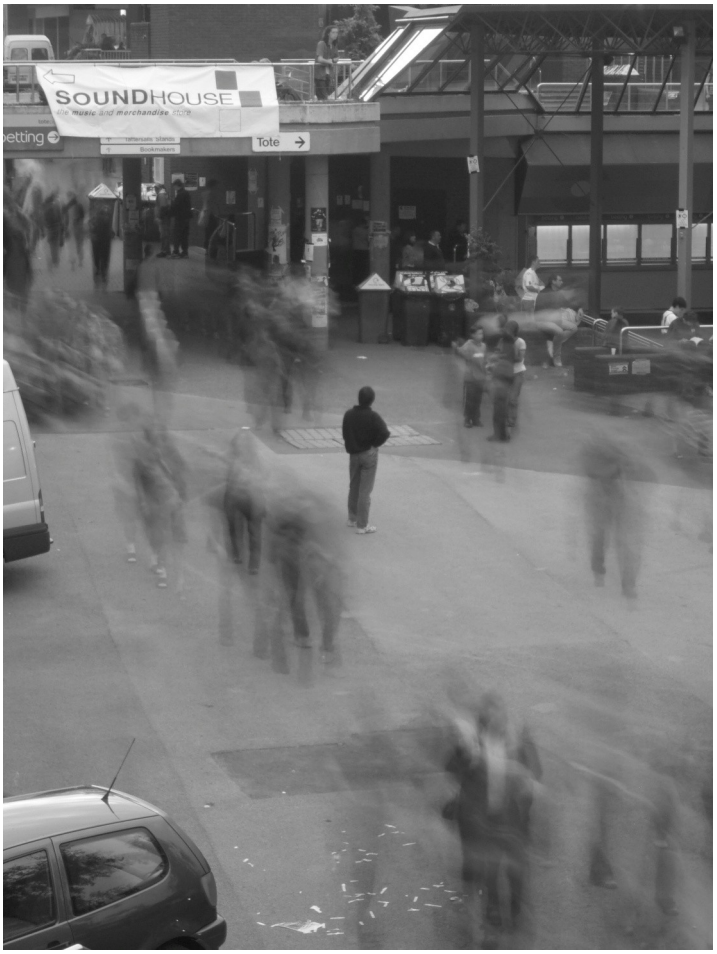
I must drink, before I hand him the Common Cup.

III.
Tonight I read how the church I love
was birthed between the dirty thighs of the segregated South.
How leadership struggled with questions of fellowship's kiss
for those who were the darker brothers.

My kindling-heart burns hot, enlightened condemner so quick to cry foul,
forgetting the Morning Star had red-light lineage;
that the Holy-of Holies smelled of bloody burnt flesh,
that human hearts make messy mortar
but hold walls in the Temple that is both now –
and yet.

Unravelling The Threads Of Community

An extract from Dave Andrews' new book, *Down Under: In-depth Community Work*, reviewed on p. 17



There were many tragedies in the 20th century. Among the least spectacular but most significant was that *we picked at the threads of our relationships so much, that we unravelled the entire fabric of many of our communities - and now find ourselves without the support we need from our human safety nets.*

There are many ways we have ruined our priceless networks of relationships.

We have ruined our networks through our current obsession with fashionable materialistic values - such as personal appearance, private property and public recognition - at the expense of traditional non-materialistic values – such as personal development, social relationships and communal responsibilities.

In annual surveys, students in the U.S. were asked their reasons for going to college. In 1971 half of them said their reason was 'to make more money' but by 1990 almost three-quarters said their reason was 'to make more money'. Over the same period the proportion who began college hoping to 'develop a meaningful philosophy of life' slumped from 76 per cent to 43 per cent'. And these trends have 'stayed unchanged.' With globalisation, what is true in the U.S. is increasingly 'true of the rest of us too'! (Gittins 2002)

The popular philosopher, Alain de Botton (2004, p. 11), states 'there are common assumptions about which motives drive us to seek high status' in materialistic

terms; 'among them a longing for money, fame, and influence.' However, de Botton suggests, counter-intuitively, 'it might be more accurate to sum up what we searching for as: "*love*".'

De Botton (2004, p. 16) argues 'our "ego" could be pictured as a leaking balloon, vulnerable to the smallest pricks of neglect, forever requiring the helium of external love to remain inflated.' He says that 'to be shown love is to feel ourselves the object of concern.' If our status is "high", we are "somebodies", and we get lots of attention. But if our status is "low", we are "nobodies", and we may get comparatively no attention at all'. So, in a society which obviously values money, fame and influence, 'money, fame and influence may be valued more a means to love, rather than as ends in themselves.' (p. 11)

But the tragedy is that the pursuit of money, fame and influence decreases, rather than increases, our chances of ever experiencing love - because its systematically devalues, distorts and destroys any true connectedness with our family and friends. (Putnam 2001, p. 322)

When we passionately pursue wealth, status and success, the reality is that we tend to *devalue* healthy interpersonal relationships. *Materialism* tends to undermine both *'altruism' - a commitment to the welfare of others* – such as *personal loyalty*, (Kasser 2002, p. 65) and *'universalism' - a commitment to the welfare of all others* – such as *social justice*. (p. 67)

When we passionately pursue wealth, status and success, the reality is that we not only tend to *devalue* healthy interpersonal relationships, we also tend to *distort* healthy interpersonal relationships. Our *obsession with materialism* leads to the *'objectification'* of others - turning our relationships with *'people'* into relationships with *'things'* – which then leads to the *'utilization'* of others - using *'people'* as we would use *'things'* – consuming people as we would any other consumer product. Like the clients at a dating centre who, when asked what they wanted, said what they wanted was more *'fresh meat on the table*.' (p. 67)

In his sensitive, but still shocking book, appropriately titled *The High Price Of Materialism*, Tim Kasser suggests that if we continue to be preoccupied more and more with materialism, we will *destroy* any possibility of developing healthy interpersonal relationships altogether. The best available research, which Kasser cites, shows that *if we become more materialistic, we will be more narcissistic, obsessive, and paranoid, more passive-aggressive and over-controlling, more unlikely to be self-actualised and satisfied, more likely to use, misuse, and abuse substances, more prone to bouts of anxiety, anger and depression, more prone to headaches, backaches and sore muscles, more likely to be abusive (insulting, swearing), more likely to be aggressive (pushing, shoving), more likely to alienate other people, less likely to invest in marriage, family, community, and less likely to make healthy choices for 'the commons'*. It's scary to think that it could happen. But it's even more scary to take a quick look around us and see that it is actually happening all over the place!

People are moving in increasing numbers from the country to the city in pursuit of improved economic opportunities. And, as a result, more than half of the population on the planet now live in one city or another. *While moving from small towns to big cities may - or may not – actually improve our economic opportunities, the move invariably reduces our social relationships.* (Putnam 2001, p. 205)

Take the mall for example. The big city mall may seem like a sophisticated version of small town market, but it isn't. Community scholar, Parker Palmer (1985, p. 47), observes: 'The mall appears to be a place of public life, but the typical mall tends to repress rather than evoke public experience. It is *"placeless space"*. Not identified with any local community. It strives to create *a fantasy environment conducive only to shopping, not the cultivation of public relatedness'*.

The mall that my sister-in-law Sophie frequents recently removed all the seats available to the public, except those in cafes, that people have to pay at least the price of a cup of coffee for in order to use. If she can't afford the price of a café latte, there's no place in the mall for her to sit and chat with her friends.

Palmer notes that 'on the public streets interaction always has the potential of flowering into more explicit forms of public life – such as leafleting, soliciting signatures for petitions, soapbox oratory, rallies, marches and like. But the mall has put a crimp in these possibilities, *for the mall, unlike the streets, is private property, and thus is not available for public activities – especially if those activities have public overtones*.' (Parker 1985, p. 48)

Jim and Anne, a couple of feisty friends of mine, have tested the possibility of using the central mall of our city as a venue for soapbox oratory on a number of important civic occasions. Only to be arrested. Ostensibly for disturbing the peace. But, actually, for trying to use the mall as meeting place when, in fact, the once-public space is now privately-owned-and-operated - as a business.

Increasing numbers of us, moving from the country to the city, find ourselves in slums. At the present, there are about a billion people living in slums. That is, about one in every six people in the world. And - unless things change – within 30 years, one in every three people in the world will live in slums. (UN Habitat 2003)

Given the fact that every slum I've been in has had little or no running water, poor sanitary facilities and frequent outbreaks of violence, it's not surprising that I've never met a person living in a slum who wasn't desperate to get out.

When I was last in Manila, I saw long lines of people from the slums queuing up to buy tickets in the lotto, in the hope that their numbers would come up, and they'd win enough money to buy the house of their dreams in the suburbs. *But moving from the slums to the suburbs is likely to reduce the relationships people have - even more than moving from small towns to big cities!* (Putnam 2001, p. 205)

There are lots of little reasons why moving into suburbia damages our relationships. Social researcher Robert Putnam says people in suburbia usually reside in a place that is separate from the places where we work and separate from the places where we play. This separation segments - rather than integrates - the relationships we have (p. 214) and the time spent commuting between these separate places adversely affects not only the time, but also the energy, that we have available for developing our relationships. So Putnam (pp. 212-3) reckons that for e*ach 10 minutes we spend in commuting, we are 10 per cent less likely to be able to invest in developing meaningful relationships*.

However the biggest single reason that suburbanisation is more damaging to our relationships than urbanisation is simply because - as the illustrious sociologist, Lewis Mumford, once said - *'suburbia is the collective effort to live a private life.*' (Putnam 2001, p. 210) According to Mumford *people typically move to suburbia with the express purpose of hiding from other people behind their picket fences.*

I can remember once talking to people in my suburb about what kind of neighbour they thought made a good neighbour. They said a good neighbour was one that 'never bothered you' - that 'kept to themselves' and 'let you keep to yourself'. They're 'no trouble mate', they said. And I thought to myself : *their idea of a good neighbour is either a dead neighbour - or no neighbour at all!*

Whether we get out of slums or not, people in the big cities have access to electricity - and through electricity - to modern technology like television.

Most people in the slums may be too poor to pay for electricity, but if you visit a slum you will find that the people have developed many ingenious ways of stealing power from the suppliers. Recently I was visiting some friends who live in a slum in Kolkata. And while I was there, the municipal authorities were trying to cut some of the thousands of unauthorised electrical connections that the people had arranged for their slum. But – as soon as the authorities cut their wires - the people spliced their severed wires, and - using long poles that they kept specially for this purpose - hooked the wires that led to their huts back onto the overhead power lines again. So that in a matter of minutes the settlement was covered by thousands and thousands of tangled black vines.

Sticking out of the black vines like dead sticks were a forest of TV antennas. The sight of so many TVs in a poor community may seem incongruous, even crazy. But we need to remember that, while a TV may be too expensive for a poor nuclear family to buy, it is as much a priority for an upwardly mobile extended family in a slum to purchase as it would be for anyone anywhere else in the world. And so - as absurd as it may seem - you can see dirt poor Bengali slum-dwellers watching programs like 'Baywatch' on cable TV in Kolkata!

Unfortunately - not only for the slum-dwellers, but for all of us - while there is evidence that interactive technologies like telephones can help in the development of our relationships, TV can destroy our relationships. Putnam (2001, p. 228) argues thatTV can destroy our relationships by taking the time that we could have otherwise invested in the development of important relationships. *Many of us watch TV on average 4 hours a day, and for each extra hour a day we watch TV, we reduce our involvement with other people by roughly 10 per cent.*

TV can also destroy our relationships by taking the energy that we could have otherwise invested in the development of important relationships. *Watching TV actually induces passivity. The more that we watch TV the more likely we are to want to take it easy - not do any activity - but rest and/or sleep*. (Putnam 2001, p. 237)

Last but not least, TV can destroy crucial relationships without our knowing it. Current research shows that *TV can provide such a palpable sense of pseudo community* - through programs such as 'Coronation Street', 'Home and Away' and 'Friends', *that we can end up caring more for our fantasy communities than for our real communities*. (Putnam 2001, p. 242) So much so, *those who watch 'Neighbours' are less likely to be involved with their neighbours than those who don't!*

Bibliography

Putnam, Robert, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001)

de Botton, Alain, *Status Anxiety* (Camberwell: Penguin, 2004)

Gittins, Ross, "Getting to the root of modern evil" *Sydney Morning Herald* 27/08/2002, www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/08/27/1030053058457.html.

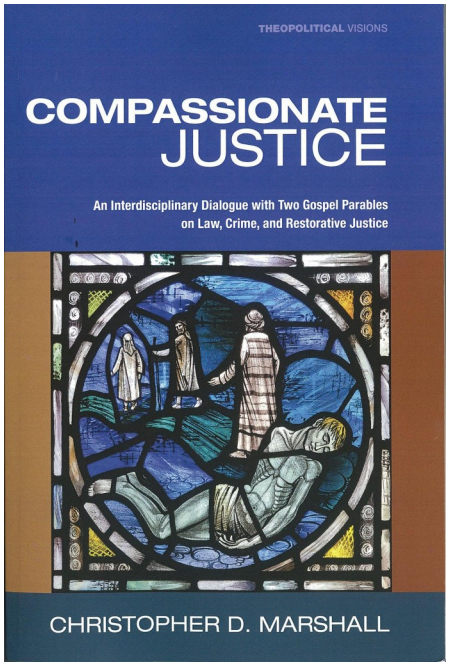
Kasser, Tim, *The High Price Of Materialism* (London: Bradford, 2002)

Palmer, Parker, *The Company Of Strangers* (New York: Crossroad, 1985)

UN Habitat *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements* (2003), www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=555&cid=5373.

.

Reviews



Compassionate Justice
by Christopher D. Marshall
(Wipf & Stock, 2012)

Mark Hurst's Review

Looking at the full title of Chris Marshall's new book I'm reminded of those books in the past where their title gives you the whole story of the book. Like this one from 1661, which begins *A sober and temperate discourse, concerning the interest of words in prayer, the just antiquity and pedigree of liturgies, or forms of prayer in churches: with a view of the state of the church, when they were first composed....* and so on. Anyway, the sub-title of *Compassionate Justice* does the book justice, describing well what the book is about.

This book is the latest from Cascade Books in their Theopolitical Visions series. I was fearful the book would be full of misprints when I found 'History' spelt 'Hisotry' on the page describing the series. Fortunately, they turned on their spellcheckers for the rest of the book.

Long-time member of AAANZ, Chris Marshall teaches in the Religious Studies Programme at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His many publications include, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (1989), *Kingdom Come: The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (1993), *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (2001), *Crowned with Glory and Honour: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (2001), and *The Little Book of Biblical Justice* (2005).

In Marshall's typical style, this book is well reasoned, well written, and his argument is clear. He explores two parables that have become firmly lodged in popular consciousness and affection - the parable of the Good Samaritan and the parable of the Prodigal Son. 'They've profoundly shaped the spiritual, aesthetic, moral and legal traditions of Western society, from inspiring works of art to prompting research on altruism and helping behaviours.'

In a newspaper interview Marshall says, 'But it is their account of the indispensable role of compassion in dealing with the restoration of both victims and offenders that offers a fresh challenge when it comes to thinking about our justice system.'

The book first examines each parable in detail from a criminal justice perspective, and then investigates how compassion can be better embedded in the institutions of modern society, especially the justice system.

'In both parables, the central characters are moved to act with compassion at the suffering they've witnessed, and thereby achieve justice. Justice and mercy are not arranged in opposition to each other, they are mutually dependent,' says Dr Marshall.

'Both stories evidently regard restorative responses grounded in compassion to be a thoroughly realistic way of dealing with the needs of victims and offenders.'

William T. Cavanaugh, Senior Research Professor, DePaul University describes the book this way: 'This is how political theology ought to be done. Marshall takes the fundamentally local problem of how communities restore relationships broken by criminal behaviour and applies the insights of Jesus' best-known parables. Marshall shuttles back and forth between the biblical narratives and the best of social science to enhance both . . . I felt like I was reading Jesus' parables for the first time, and I also learned to think in new ways about criminal justice.'

Another reviewer said, 'Few but Marshall could have written this book.' I agree. Chris brings to the book both his skills in biblical scholarship and his practical experience in restorative justice. He is a 'practitioner' in both fields.

There may be some who look at this book title and say, 'I have no interest in 'Law, Crime, and Restorative Justice.' If you are only interested in biblical studies, the book is well worth it just for the exegesis Marshall provides on these two parables. He thoroughly covers the scholarship available and adds insights of his own. He pulls together the best teaching on these two parables that I have seen. After reading what Chris writes about these two parables, the reader *will be* interested in law, crime and restorative justice because he makes the connections so clearly.

Some of the ideas in the book that stood out for me include what Marshall has to say about the question the lawyer raised 'Who is my neighbour?' The response that Jesus gives in telling the story of the Good Samaritan is not so much about the definition of 'neighbour' but the meaning of 'love'. 'For neighbours are not simply created by legal fiat; they are discovered through love, and love is a quality of human relationships before it is a category of law. When love and compassion are present, the parable teaches, the identification of neighbours takes care of itself.' (78)

Marshall quotes Richard Hays in talking about the way Jesus used stories. 'Jesus never told stories in which the good guys kill the bad guys and the New Testament never narrates any act of sword-wielding heroism by Christian believers.' (135) Chris goes on to say, 'Jesus' parable surely excludes the legitimacy of using violence in the name of love to render other people as victims, even if they are perceived to be guilty of violent wrongdoing themselves.'

While the Good Samaritan parable is about crime and its victims, the second parable could be called "'The Tender-Hearted Father and His Two Difficult Sons", with the spotlight falling on the ruptured nature of their relationships and the restoring actions required to secure reconciliation.' (186) Marshall writes, 'If after pondering the parable's perspective on these matters [an outworking of the discipline of forgiveness], we are left with the feeling that 'this couldn't possibly happen in the real world,' then perhaps we have begun to 'hear' the parable in all its offensive glory.' (194)

One thing the second parable teaches us is 'relational renewal in the aftermath of victimisation, if it is to occur at all, can only ever come as a *gift* from victim to offender. It is not a commodity that can be unilaterally purchased by confession or apology.' (211)

Chris notes that one element missing in the Prodigal story is 'punishment.' 'The replacement of shame and humiliation with honour and respect requires something far more potent than punishment. It requires confession, compassion, and forgiveness, and these in turn usually require some kind of personal encounter between victim and offender.' (231)

In the last section of the book called "Just Compassion", Marshall tries to bring learning from the parables into the field of public policy. I like what he says about how Jesus used storytelling.

> Jesus used the parables as tools for breaking open existing frames of reference, for challenging or confounding taken-for-granted assumptions about the world and its notions of justice, and for offering a radically different way of conceiving reality, a way conditioned by the restoring and liberating justice of God now at work in the present. (250)

In talking about the two parables examined in the book he says, 'Both stories deal with the most realistic situations imaginable – an act of criminal violence and a breakdown in family relationships – and both commend practicable ways of resisting the common drag of human behaviour toward selfishness and retributive resentment.' (251)

The compassion taught in these parables has the possibility of being lost as biblical stories like these are no longer part of Western thinking. Marshall writes:

> As the plausibility of the Christian vision of reality recedes in the West, a question mark hangs over the future of our moral culture: will its 'gentler ethical prejudices,' such as compassion for the weak and service of the indigent, persist once the faith that gave them meaning has withered away? (258)

The challenge left for us as readers is, will we continue to be salt and light in our society? Will we allow the compassion, love and forgiveness from these parables shape us as the people of God today? And will we then infect society around us with these values?

Doug Hynd's Review

With their Theopolitical Visions series, Cascade Books have opened up new ground in political theology, drawing particularly on Anabaptist perspectives. The scope of what now falls within the category of political theology is nicely illustrated by their latest title in this series, *Compassionate Justice*, by a founding member of AAAANZ, Chris Marshall, who is currently the Head of the School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies at Victoria University, Wellington.

Chris is perhaps best known for his work in New Testament, but he has also been actively engaged in the restorative justice movement in New Zealand. His latest book brings both those dimensions of his vocation together in a profound and important way that points to a much broader understanding of political theology.

The two parables that form the focus of this book, the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the parable of the Prodigal Son, have certainly become firmly lodged in popular consciousness and affection and remain there, even in a societies like Australia and New Zealand that are increasingly unfamiliar with much of the biblical narrative. There can be no doubt that these simple, short, but profound and surprisingly subversive tales have had a significant impact in their shaping of the spiritual, aesthetic, moral, and legal traditions of Western civilization. At the heart of *Compassionate Justice* is the conviction that these parables are capable of continuing to inform debate and offer fresh perspectives on a wide range of moral and social issues today, in this case our approach to issues of law, crime and restorative justice.

Noting that both stories deal with episodes of serious interpersonal offending, and both recount restorative responses on the part of the leading characters, Chris Marshall in *Compassionate Justice* draws on the insights of restorative justice theory, legal philosophy, and social psychology to offer a fresh reading of these two great parables. Chris also provides

a compelling analysis of how the priorities commended by the parables are pertinent to the criminal justice system today and argues strongly that the conscientious cultivation of compassion is essential to achieving true justice. Indeed restorative justice strategies, he argues, provide a promising and practical means of attaining to this goal of reconciling justice, taking us beyond our fixation with retribution.

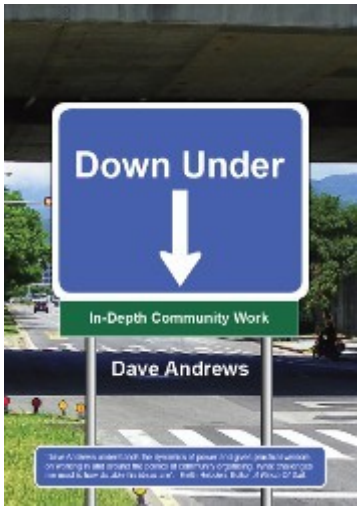
While the book is not a quick or easy read, it is rewarding, moving and challenging and accessible to those who are not New Testament scholars, or legal philosophers. The key in reading it is to take your time and go back again and again to the parables themselves. If you are willing to take the time to work your way through this book you will find yourself reading the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son with fresh eyes and fresh questions about their implications for issues of crime, law and restorative justice.

The book falls into three sections. The first section, 'Restoration and the Victim' unpacks the tale of the Good Samaritan in its cultural, historical and social context before going on to address the implications of the parable for our approach to the ethics of care for those in severe and pressing need. Here Chris engages with the issues raised by the question of how and to what extent compassion can be given shape in the provisions of our legal system. Here he moves from the field of New Testament scholarship, and proves a reliable guide to the questions of legal philosophy and public policy.

In the second section, dealing with the Prodigal Son, entitled 'Restoration and the Offender', his unpacking of the meanings and significance of the parable is a joy to read and was for me possibly the highlight of the book. The richness, complexity and power of the parable is understated in much of the preaching on it and I would urge all those faced with that task to take time with Marshall's unpacking of the story.

The briefer final section, 'Just Compassion' shifts gears in its addressing of the significance of compassion for our approach to public policy in dealing with crime. Chris provides here a thoughtful but powerful response to recent critiques of restorative justice and highlights why in our pursuit of justice we should never lose sight of the demands of compassion that drive us towards forgiveness.

This is interdisciplinary scholarship at its best. Marshall has read widely in both New Testament and legal philosophy, particularly as it touches public policy issues and has thought deeply about both. In the end his theology drives towards an account of a politics of compassion, informed by Jesus' life, teaching and death and resurrection that engages critically with questions that are significant in a society in which compassion seems increasingly "missing in action". It is an important contribution toward a contemporary Anabaptist political theology that starts by listening to Jesus and then explores how it can be embodied in a way that pays attention to both the victim and the offender.



Down Under: In Depth Community Work
Dave Andrews (Mosaic Press, 2012)
Reviewed by Eddie Ozols

"There are many tragedies of the 20th century. Among the least spectacular, but most significant, was picking at the threads of our relationships so much, that we unravelled the entire fabric of many of our communities. Now we find ourselves without the support we need from our human safety nets."

Dave Andrews' book will have most people committed to finishing the whole book after the first two pages, where, citing research, he demonstrates that connectedness leads to better outcomes for people in health, happiness, honesty, generosity, non-economic prosperity and safety. When one considers community development broadly speaking, these are outcomes most people working in the community sector would see as positive outcomes in their roles.

At its heart this book is a call to get back to relationships in human services and community work. However its deeper message is about authenticity and being true to one self.

Prior to developing his main thesis, Dave Andrews undertakes a quick survey of how communities and connectedness has diminished. He attributes this loss of community to numerous factors. Materialism, the advent of large shopping malls leading to the "privatisation of public spaces," the rising numbers of people leaving smaller rural communities to live in cities and the impacts this will have in developing nations such as China and the correlation between commuting to work, where he suggests a 10 minute commute will decrease by 10% the ability to develop meaningful relationships. Churches have not been immune, as some churches establish regional centres at the expense of local churches involved in their communities.

The underlying reason he advances for the decline in community is the increasing focus on self through the pursuit of money, fame and influence at the expense of relationships and experiencing the love of others altruistically. Research shows that between 1970 and 1990, the proportion of students motivated to go to college by money rose from about half to three quarters.

Dave Andrews goes on to demonstrate how this has all led to a loss of community volunteers with no special skills other than interest and concern; historically, this group have done the things which met the needs of people. The professionalising of community development has resulted in communities losing their soul. His exposition of the ten dangers of professionalisation of community work and the seven propositions that disempower communities makes this book a required text in all social work educational settings. Those who go into social welfare with good motives, often end up part of "the system", more concerned with the professional work they do than the people they assist.

Focussing on the original meaning of the word "profession," the author then goes on to suggest a remedy lies in a return to vocation and he spends some time developing this idea, referring to Henri Nouwen, Carl Jung and Viktor Frankl to suggest people need a call. "Our own call may come to us in our own small voice, a small still voice from somewhere deep inside us: 'our vocation acts like a law of God. It makes demands upon us. It demands our best and at times even better than our best. To liberate. To redeem. To transform.'"

Having worked in disability, his references to Jean Vanier, who spoke about the suffering of the disabled and their families at the hands of the powerful (defined as doctors, psychologists, social workers and others), resonated powerfully. He advocates deconstructing and reconstructing the professions, so that people seeking to assist really care (rather than empathising as they have been taught) and use their skills and relevant knowledge to serve rather than accumulating power and prestige. This he posits will result in "amateur, radical and revolutionary activists".

This leads into an analysis of bureaucracies and counter bureaucracies. Counter bureaucracies being defined "in theory, as well as practice, not actually committed to the work, but simply maintaining the system." In NSW this was evident to me as the politics of NSW ensured a bureaucracy, compliant to its political masters rather than really seeking to serve and deliver for the people it was designed to serve.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is quoted at length to make a point about the use of power and fear to control people. He expounds Jewish thought on the Genesis account of the creation of humankind to tell two stories about moving from unbearable isolation to tolerable association. These stories gave me a profound understanding of the roots of Anabaptism, community and non-violence. I am not sure if this was the intention of the author, however the analysis of Genesis 2:23 by Sacks was enlightening.

Most readers of the book will identify with the analysis of bureaucracies and counter bureaucracies. Dave summarises the conflicts inherent in both, suggesting that there are two policy options in which both operate – love and fear or community and security. This is neatly summarised in a helpful table which contrasts characteristics and behaviours of both. Compliance and resistance to bureaucracy and counter bureaucracy is examined and helpful suggestions given to assist practitioners resist compliance with bureaucracies.

Unlike many books that theorise about subjects such as this and leave readers trying to contextualise how this works in reality, Dave Andrews provides studies based on TEAR Australia and TEAR Fund (UK). Transformation into bureaucracies as they grew but not wanting to lose the "spirit" in how they operate are described. Spirit was defined and is not religious in its definition. Many books have been written about spirit in the workplace and Jossey-Bass publishers have a catalogue of books on the topic.

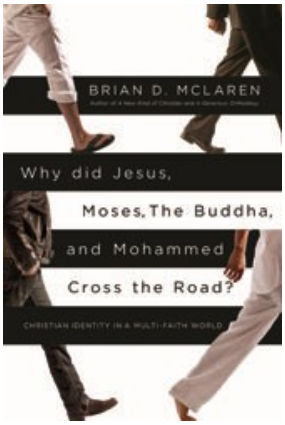
The TEAR study describes the practical outcomes of open conversations which were facilitated by Dave Andrews. These resulted in affirmations and suggestions which are person centred and relational, prioritising relationships over bureaucracy. In England, the director of TEAR Fund has authored a paper quoted in this book, describing three qualities of new systems – agility, relationality and glocality.

The book concludes with an amazing account of community work undertaken by Ange, Dave's wife who has worked with refugees in Brisbane since 1989.

I identified with this book as someone who has resisted bureaucracy while working in large bureaucracies. The practical examples contained in it may assist others challenge the powers. Often people are fearful of large institutions simply because they are large institutions. As government approaches to community services changes throughout Australia, the opportunity is there once again to get back to grass roots and engage with people and communities.

The political motive may be that government has recognised its inability (read lack of resources) to do everything and has recognised the community resources and assets better able to engage with communities. Place -based planning and decision making is the focus in NSW government policy, and the opportunity is there for people and local organisations and churches to engage locally as governments seek to devolve decisions and resources to locals.

This is a must for all idealists graduating from social work and other humanities courses to learn how to "avoid becoming the system they inhabit" (p88).



Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?: Christian Identity In A Multi-faith World

Brian McLaren (Jericho Books, 2012)

Reviewed by Mark Hurst

If the 2013 AAANZ conference entitled 'From Pieces to Peace: More Than Just Neighbours In a Multifaith World' was a course I was teaching, this would be one of the textbooks I would assign. McLaren covers many of the themes we will be exploring in January. So if you want to prepare yourself for the conference, this is the book to read.

McLaren has been described as theologian, husband, father, grandfather, educator, pastor, activist, speaker, facilitator, author, and thinker. Critics have used terms like heretic, liberal, subversive, and unorthodox. He definitely creates a stir with his writing and this book will continue that.

One reviewer says, 'This is a book about identity - a new perspective on how one can view the Christian faith, oneself, others, their faith (or non-faith) and the opportunity to become part of an exciting new pilgrimage to a vastly better destination.'

McLaren writes about his motivation for writing the book: 'My pursuit, not just in this book but in my life, is a Christian identity that moves me toward people of other faiths in wholehearted love, not in spite of their non-Christian identity and not in spite of my own Christian identity, but because of my identity as a follower of God in the way of Jesus.' (11)

He argues for a 'different paradigm'. 'We are increasingly faced with a choice, I believe, not between kindness and hostility, but between kindness and nonexistence. This is the choice we must make, the road we must cross.' (12)

As McLaren travels and speaks in many settings, he encounters Christians ready to leave Christianity. What passes for the Christian faith does not line up with what people know of Jesus. 'More and more of us are seeking treatment for Conflicted Religious Identity Syndrome (CRIS). You are seeking a way of being Christian that makes you more hospitable, not more hostile...more loving not more judgmental...more like Christ and less (I'm sad to have to say this) like many Christians you have met.' (15)

Chapter two of the book is introduced with this excellent quotation from James Alison: 'Give people a common enemy, and you will give them a common identity. Deprive them of an enemy and you will deprive them of the crutch by which they know who they are.' (13) Much of American Christianity is like this; it needs an enemy to exist. In our lifetime it has been Communists, secular humanists, gays, and now Muslims.

In a footnote on page 56, McLaren quotes Miroslav Volf connecting this sense of needing a common enemy with *difference* and *violence*. 'Emphasising difference precedes violence. We need to see each other as alien in order to unleash our hatred in violence.'

McLaren asks 'How do we remain loyal to what is good and real in our faith without giving tacit support to what is wrong and dangerous? How do we, as Christians faithfully affirm the uniqueness and universality of Christ without turning that belief into an insult or a weapon?' (20)

He then spends time in the book describing the many sordid manifestations of hostility in the history, practice and theology of current day Christianity - and the opportunities to alter widespread practices, liturgy, baptism, interpretations of the history of the Christian faith, the creation story, church calendar, confession and doctrine that serve to unwittingly feed the hostility we must eradicate. He champions the adoption of what he calls a 'strong-benevolent' Christian identity.

Chapter 20 on 'How Baptism Differs from Sitting on Santa's Knee' offers some fresh insights on baptism. He describes what baptism meant in Israel at the time of John the Baptist and how John 'revolutionised it'. 'The Temple and its baptisms, then, were ritual enactments to bond adherents to this strong-superior identity: *God is hostile to all unclean, and through baptism we separate ourselves from all that is unclean*.' (181)

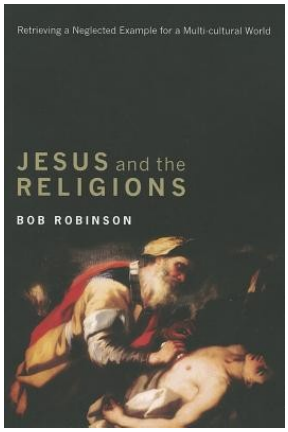
For John, baptism became 'the radical reversal of identities of exclusion and hostility' and instead became a sign of identification with 'something new: the kingdom, reign, or commonwealth of God – which is called not to separation and exclusion, but rather to solidarity and reconciliation.' (185)

Chapters 21 and 22 deal with the topic of how we use the Bible in this attempt to model a new identity. McLaren talks about the stories of violence in the Old Testament and says 'we can't tell stories in isolation'. He has discovered 'example after example of hostile-reconciling pairings as I read and reflect on the Bible.' (194) He lists some of these pairings – Elijah in 1 Kings 18 calling down fire with Jesus's rebuke of the disciples wanting to do the same in Luke 9; Moses sending people to kill their brothers in Exodus 32 with the story of the Transfiguration in Mark 9, 'where the nonviolent words and ways of Jesus are honoured over those of Moses'; and the slaughter of the Canaanites in Deuteronomy 7 with Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. 'The Bible itself, it seems, has built-in reconciling stories to counteract and disarm the hostile ones.' (194)

The closing chapters of the book take on 'The Missional Challenge'. He argues that, 'Christian mission begins with friendship – not utilitarian friendship, the religious version of network marketing – but genuine friendship, friendship that translates love for neighbours in general into knowing, appreciating, liking, and enjoying this or that neighbour in particular.' (223) These chapters remind me of Simon Carey Holt's helpful book *God Next Door: Spirituality & Mission in the Neighbourhood.*

McLaren writes, 'The earliest followers of Christ did not call themselves *the Christians*, but rather *the friends*.' (224) He thinks we need to rediscover this central Christian idea of 'subversive or transgressive friendship – friendship that crosses boundaries of otherness and dares to offer and receive hospitality.' (228)

Among the people McLaren acknowledges at the end of the book is Michael Hardin. Those of you who were challenged by Michael's presentations in Australia and New Zealand should be interested in the issues this book raises. A leader/reader's study guide to assist with individual reflection and group study is available for a limited time at: http://brianmclaren.net/archives/books/brians-books/why-did-jesus-moses-the-buddha-a.html So, read the book and come along to Sydney in January 2013 to explore this multi-faith journey with others on the road.



Jesus And the Religions: Retrieving a Neglected Example for a Multi-cultural World

Bob Robinson (Cascade, 2012)

Reviewed by Dave Andrews

Let me be quite upfront about my appreciation of *Jesus and the Religions*. I am a follower of Jesus who has worked with people of other religions for more than forty years, and I have not come across such a helpful book on the topic in a long time.

This is not a personal story like Stanley Jones' classic reflection on *The Christ of the Indian Road* but a dispassionate theological assessment of the key gospel passages referring to Jesus' engagement with people of other religions. What it lacks in Jones's passion it makes up for in an abundance of thorough, systematic, well-thought-out, insight, outlook, analysis and advice.

Robinson considers the way Jesus related to non-Jews – particularly Gentiles and Samaritans - and asks what lessons Christians can learn from this. His answer includes:

- Acknowledging particularities like places and rituals of worship (p.211)
- Taking a conciliatory approach (p212)
- Choosing not to denigrate the other (p 213) – for example, doesn't call down fire (p214)
- Accepting hospitality as a way forward (p215) – for example, all food and drink is clean (p133/5)
- Practicing respectful dialogue (p216) – for example, doesn't ask a Samaritan to become a Jew
- Appreciating the other's perspective (p217)
- Including other people as the people of God (p219) – like in the reference to 'other sheep' (p157).

Robinson notes that Jesus only commended 'great faith' twice in the gospels, and each time it was of a Gentile, not someone of his religion (p114)!

I would encourage you to read Robinson's book about the way Jesus treated people of other religions. And it is my prayer those of us who say we believe Jesus is 'The Way' would relate to people of other religions the way he did.

Contributor Profiles

Bruce Hamill, a New Zealand Presbyterian, blogs at dbhamill.wordpress.com.

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.

Nathan Hobby blogs at perthanabaptists.wordpress.com and works as librarian and academic dean at Vose Seminary.

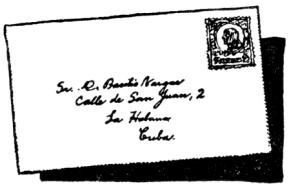
Doug Hynd is a retired public servant who is now working on a PhD on the relationship between the Federal Government and church related agencies in delivering community services.

Eddie Ozols currently works for a not for profit in the disability sector after over thirty years in the bureaucracy working in corrections, health and disability. He met Mennonites in 1980 while volunteering in a refugee camp in Thailand and ever since has been a visitor to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and read widely on Anabaptism. He is passionate about international development and serves on the board of an African NGO. He blogs at eddieozols.blogspot.com.au.

Chris Summerfield is from Perth, has a band called The Filthy Jesus Experiment and blogs at achurchlessfaith.blogspot.com.au.

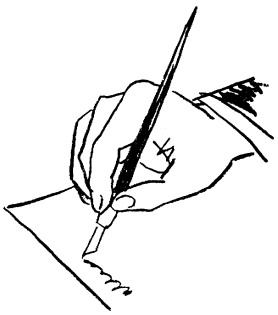
Melissa Weaver teaches 6th grade English to students from all over the world and writes poetry to make sense of the world in light of God's redemptive story. She and her husband are members of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

How to...SUBSCRIBE



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

How to... CONTRIBUTE



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 55 is From Pieces to Peace: More Than Just Neighbours In a Multifaith World. The deadline is 15 February 2013.

Non-themed submissions are always welcome too.

How to... JOIN

If you identify with the Anabaptist impulse and want to join the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand, visit www.anabaptist.asn.au.

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

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