ON THE ROAD

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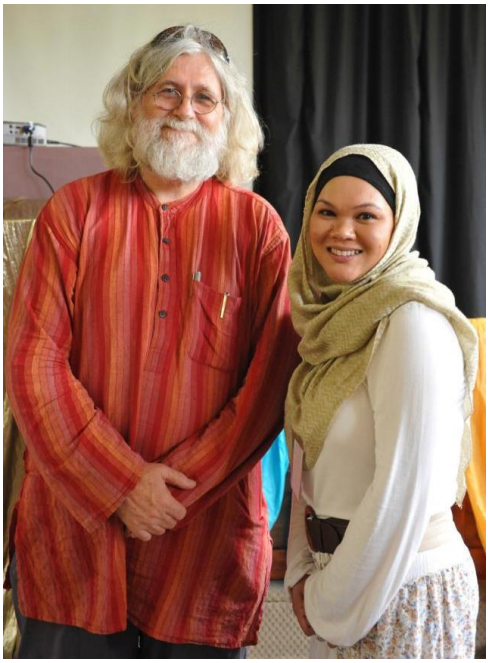

2013 Conference Edition

From Pieces to Peace: More Than Just Neighbours in a Multi-faith World

From the editor

Nathan Hobby

We begin this issue with a tribute to Ross Langmead, foundation member, who died in June. Oral tradition is that the title of this journal was influenced by the name of Ross's album of the same name. AAANZ is one of many parts of the church who will sorely miss Ross.

The 2013 AAANZ Conference was a rich experience, and in this issue we bring edited papers delivered at the conference by Dave Andrews and Matt Anslow, as well as reflections from Zalman Kastel. We have a report on the conference, and an article from Jon Rudy about his interfaith peace work in the Phillippines.

In response to the call for submissions, one reader, Terje Ronnenberg, provided a link to his writings on interfaith perspectives on usury; you can find this at www.truth.info/life/christians.and.banking.htm#27. Many of this issue's contributors also have websites listed in the contributor profiles.

Also in this issue, we review some significant books, including one from an Australian friend of AAANZ, David Neville. Two of the books reviewed relate to John Howard Yoder. Just as this issue was nearly complete, a couple of readers drew my attention to renewed discussion over Yoder's sexual misconduct, and, particularly, claims the reponse of the Mennonite church as an institution was very inadequate. Barbra Graber's guest post "What's to be Done About John Howard Yoder" can be found on Ted Grimsrud's blog thinkingpacificism.net and makes for sobering reading. Ted has followed up with a series of "Reflections from a chagrined 'Yoderian'".

The different format of this issue has been made necessary by the many footnotes. The page size is A5, so if you are printing it out, two pages will fit per sheet. Unfortunately, there was not time to produce a Kindle or Epub version.

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Ross Langmead Remembered

Mark Hurst

If you go to the Whitley College website (http://whitley.unimelb.edu.au/shalom-rosslangmead) you will find the following message from Frank Rees, the principal:

> On Saturday 22 June 2013 our friend and colleague Dr Ross Langmead suffered a major heart attack. After a period in intensive care, Ross died peacefully, surrounded by his family, on 29 June 2013.
> This is a time of great sadness for all who have known and worked with Ross. We are grateful to God for the precious gift of this wonderful man.
> Our love and prayers are with Ross's family at this time. At Whitley we are grateful for all the prayer support and love we have received.

Ross was one of the founding members of AAANZ and attended the first Anabaptist gathering held in Tasmania in 1995. While never on the executive committee, he was always supportive behind the scenes – playing guitar and leading singing at gatherings, hosting conferences and meetings at Whitley, and hosting (along with his wife Alison) Mary and I on a number visits to Melbourne over the years.

On our first visit to Melbourne after we moved to Australia and had lived in Sydney for a couple of years we stayed with the Langmeads and visited their Westgate Baptist church community. We were introduced in the Sunday worship service and said something like, "We've heard a lot about the rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne. After living in Sydney and now visiting Melbourne for the first time, we can definitely say – we are Sydneysiders!" The congregation booed us.

We first met Ross in Chicago in 1990. We were attending an urban ministry conference and were planning on moving to Australia later that year. We heard there were a group of Aussies also attending and we wanted to meet them. The group included Ross as well as John Smith, Athol Gill, Tim Costello, and a couple of others. We knew about John Smith from his book *Advance Australia Where?* and Athol Gill from *Life On The Road* but we had never heard of Tim Costello. We mentioned to Ross during the conference something about Tim Costello being there with John Smith and he quickly corrected us, "No, John Smith is here *with* Tim Costello." Our first lesson in Australian church politics!

We attended Ross's workshop at the conference and learned about Westgate Baptist Community. Ross taught us some songs that he wrote for the community and we purchased a cassette tape called "On The Road: Sixteen Songs For The Christian Community To Sing". As a family we played that tape over and over again until we learned the songs by heart. And it was Ross's Aussie accent on the songs that introduced us to Aussie English.

I also had contact with Ross over the years through the Australian Association for Mission Studies which he helped get started and played a key role in right up till the end of his life. He was a clear Anabaptist presence in that very ecumenical organisation.

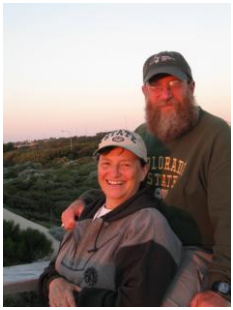
At the National Home Church Enrichment Weekend held in Canberra in 1995 we attended a session led by Ross where he asked the participants to list what they liked about being in a home church. He took the answers from the group, went away for an hour or two and came back with a song he taught us. It was called "When Two Or Three Can Get Together" and we still teach and sing it today.

Writing and teaching that song illustrated what Ross was so good at and what many will remember him for. In his quiet, humble way he listened to the group, used his musical gifts to create a song, and then stepped back and released it as a gift for others to use. I can still see him smiling as we sang.

The View from Ephesians 4

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

Mark and Mary Hurst, AAANZ staffworkers



Multifaith stories can be dangerous. Jesus almost got himself thrown off the local Nazareth cliff for mentioning that God cares about people of other faiths as well. He just preached in his local synagogue and was a big hit. "He won the approval of all; they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips." (Luke 4:22)

But Jesus was not on a popularity campaign (he didn't care about opinion polls). He was there to speak the truth and the truth was, "No prophet is ever accepted in his own country." (4:24)

Jesus then mentioned two stories from Israel's past where God showed concern for outsiders. He cited the story of Elijah and the widow at Zarephath found in 1 Kings 17 and Elisha's healing of the Syrian Naaman told in 2 Kings 5. Both of these stories use people of other faiths as positive examples for the Jewish people.

Jesus's listeners were not happy. "When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged." (4:28) That is when they attempted to throw Jesus off the local cliff.

We hope no one who attended this year's AAANZ conference on being good multifaith neighbours returned to their local congregations and was threatened with bodily harm. But we hear from AAANZ members often about how lonely it can be in traditional evangelical churches to enter onto a different spiritual journey, one that may include travelling with outsiders from "Zarephath" or "Syria".

The experience for us of hearing stories from Jewish, Islamic, and Buddhist folks at the AAANZ conference was a rich one. We continue to look for ways to connect with outsiders – religious and otherwise – knowing this is the way of Jesus.

The Love of Neighbour

Doug Sewell, AAANZ President

"The small man builds cages for everyone he knows," wrote Hafez-e-Shirazi the Persian poet. And Czech playwrite and politician Vaclav Havel said, "Keep the company of those who seek the truth—run from those who have found it."

Fundamentalist exclusivity in its many and various shades of black and white is the single greatest obstacle to love of neighbour as it defines its rightness in terms of the wrongness of others.

In an increasingly diverse and sometimes polarised society, how then ought those who seek to follow the way of Jesus relate as neighbours to so many who are so different from themselves? The Anabaptist Conference *From Pieces to Peace*, held in January, about peace building between different faiths and cultures looked at 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. The multi-faith gathering found by listening closely to the different stories that each brought to the conversation a place for friendship began to take shape.

Theologian Jorgen Moltmann stated, "Jesus welcomes all humanity into the divine friendship… for friendship is the highest form of love."

In his recent book *Why Did Jesus Moses the Buddha and Mohammed Cross the Road?* Brian McLaren wrote, "Friendliness was so essential to Jesus' identity that his critics labeled him a 'friend of sinners', bemoaning the fact that he constantly welcomed the wrong people to the table." McLaren invites his readers to what he calls subversive friendships with the 'Other': "People involved in friendships of companionship, conviviality and conspiracy."

Wes Howard-Brook currently on a Pace e Bene *Inspiritors* speaking tour in Australia asks, "What binds us together as a 'people'?" He develops a way to redeem "religion" as a binding force. "The Latin root of the much maligned word 'religion' (*religio*) means precisely 'to bind again'. It presumes that previous bonds have come undone, and new ones must be forged." Howard-Brook says, "Sadly, 'religion' has become associated for many with harsh, judgmental, rule-based institutions, or with the hateful prejudices of some who 'in the name of God' proclaim judgment on people they don't like or are afraid of: asylum seekers, people of different sexual identity, and so on."

The question which we all, of any faith tradition, need to ask is: What according to my tradition is my duty to my neighbour of another culture, faith or religion?

When a Jewish expert in the law quizzed Jesus with a similar question, we read his provocative reply in Luke where he contrasts the compassionate response by an outsider to a victim of injustice with that of the self-focused, disinterested religious insiders. Martin Luther King Jr. in his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech described the Samaritan outsider as "a man of another race." The racially vilified Samaritan overcame his own prejudices to not just take pity on the alien victim and bandage his wounds but ensure his ongoing welfare, pay for his expenses and generously say, after leaving him with another carer, "when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."

Jesus then asked the legal expert, "Who do you think was a neighbour to the man?" To which the man who thought he knew the truth replied, "The one who had mercy on him." And to reinforce that the correct answer alone was not enough, Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

2013 AAANZ Conference: Neighbors in a Multi-faith world[1]

Mark S. Hurst and Nathan Hobby

Over the Australia Day weekend the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) held its biennial conference in Sydney with the theme "From Pieces to Peace: More Than Just Neighbours in a Multi-faith World."

More than just a talkfest about interfaith issues, the planners hoped for a weekend where participants would experience interfaith community. Speakers were invited representing different faiths—Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist. Two Australian Aboriginal guests shared their perspective as well.

The conference began with a traditional Aboriginal acknowledgement of place and country led by Ray Minniecon, an Aboriginal pastor and leader of a number of programs including World Vision Australia's Indigenous program. Minniecon has spoken about indigenous issues at local, national and international forums. He reminded those gathered that Aboriginals call Australia Day, Invasion Day.

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[1] First appeared as a press release on *The Mennonite* (7 February 2013) www.themennonite.org/public_press_releases/Anabaptists_meet_down_under_to_explore_being_neighbors_in_a_multifaith_world

In a controversial comparison, he said, "Think what it was like for Jewish people in Germany during the Nazi regime." It is a day for mourning and not celebration for the original inhabitants of Australia.

Dave Andrews gave the first presentation of the weekend entitled "The Anabaptist Tradition and Peaceful Christlike Interfaith Conversations."

Andrews, his wife Ange, and their family, have lived and worked in intentional communities with marginalised groups of people in Australia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal for more than thirty years. He now lives in a large joint household with his wife, children, grandchildren and others in an inner city community called the Waiters Union in Brisbane, Australia. Interfaith conversations have kept Dave busy in recent years.

In his talk, Andrews addressed many of the questions Christians raise when thinking about relating to people of other faiths. "Isn't our task to convert others?" "No" he said, "Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our task is to be a witness."

Andrews quoted Matthew 23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves." Jesus wanted his followers to produce disciples who were witnesses—salt and light in their world.

The response to Andrews' talk came from Nora Amath, Chairperson of Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of All Humanity. Amath works regularly with Dave in interfaith work. She told some of her family's story. They were from an indigenous group in Viet Nam that was forced to flee the country and ended up as refugees. Eventually she made her way to the United States and later Australia.

"The challenge in interfaith conversation is to establish 'safe places' where we can hear each other."

She stressed that "love of neighbor" was central in Islam as well as Christianity. When asked what it is about Islam that feeds her she said, "My life revolves around prayer. I schedule my day around worship of God."

Rabbi Zalman Kastel joined the conversation. He is from the Lubavitch Hasidic tradition of Judaism and works with Together for Humanity, a not-for-profit organization that is helping schools, organizations and communities to respond effectively to differences of culture and belief.

They do this by bringing students, teachers, and those in the community into contact with people from diverse backgrounds in an open, supportive and enjoyable setting to inspire interest, empathy, and understanding as well as questioning existing prejudices; encouraging greater appreciation of others as people.

Rabbi Zalman called the conference participants to "walk into the sea" in multi-faith relationships trusting God as the people of Israel did when facing the Red Sea. Zalman approaches interfaith conversations firmly committed to his own religion and he noted that while in the past people killed each other over differences, today, unfortunately, we pretend they don't matter.

Later, in a response to a question, he remarked that there is a high price to relativism. To another question about the authority of the Bible—a key question for many Christians—he said that he saw the (Hebrew) Bible as the 'literal Word of God,' particularly the first five books with the prophets as a kind of inspired interpretation.

What he meant by this, however, was possibly different from evangelicals; he placed himself in the line of the Pharisees who were willing to take on rabbinic interpretation as opposed to the more literalist Sadducees.

Jarrod McKenna, a member of AAANZ and part of the Christian Engagement Team at World Vision Australia, shared on "An Anabaptist Vision For Being More Than Just Neighbours." He told interfaith stories from his work in Western Australia and increasingly outside Australia.

Matt Anslow, TEAR Australia's Young Adults Coordinator, presented an excellent Bible study entitled "A (Recovering) Racist's Reading of Matthew 15:21-28."

His presentation grew out of his PhD study of the Gospel of Matthew and drew on the work of the scholar Grant LeMarquand.

He believes the story about a "Canaanite woman" in Matthew 15 is a reversal of the destruction of the seven nations in Deuteronomy 7.

"Even Jesus is forced to deal with the racism of his day. He is forced to make space for the other; spurred on by the challenge of the other," he said.

Kyinzom Tsering, a Tibetan Buddhist woman, joined the other speakers in an afternoon roundtable forum entitled "Love of the Other." Moderated by AAANZ president Doug Sewell, each of the speakers responded to questions from conference participants.

AAANZ holds these bi-national conferences every two years on long weekends and often uses the Monday morning session for a time to do some dreaming. It is one of the few opportunities members have to meet face-to-face and discuss the future of Anabaptism Down Under. This year's discussion was full of talk about going home and building one-on-one relationships with people from other faith traditions.

Plans were discussed for the 2015 conference in a year when Australia will be celebrating 100 years of the Anzac Tradition, the national founding myth coming out of Australia's role in World War 1. Conference participants agreed that an Anabaptist response was needed to this national celebration of war.

There were fifty conference delegates from four states of Australia and from New Zealand. Recordings of several talks are available now at the AAANZ website.

Peaceful, Christ-like Inter-faith Conversations[2]

Dave Andrews

> Arguably the best way to initiate change in the consciousness of mutually hostile groups towards peaceful coexistence is by the building of one-to-one friendships among individuals from both sides. As stories spread of opponents "acting out of character", they erode the foundations of prejudice and stereo-typing upon which centuries-long structures of animosity often rest.[3]

I used to teach a course on Christian community work at a Christian college in Queensland. At the start of the course, I always got students to draw a picture of their ideal community. Not surprisingly many of the Christian students drew a picture of a Christian community with a church with a steeple with a cross on it at the centre of the community.

'So your ideal community is a Christian community,' I would observe.

'Yes,' they would say. 'It is.'

'So where is the place in your ideal community for people who are not Christians?' I would ask.

'In our ideal community everyone is a Christian,' they would say proudly.

'So' I would say to them, 'if everyone in your ideal community is a Christian, and you want to work to make this ideal a reality, then the only options for Muslims in your world would be for them to be converted—or terminated. And that is exactly the same aggressive intolerant attitude that Christians accuse Muslims of advocating. Where is the good news of Jesus in that?'

In the light of the role my religion has played in major wars, I became alarmed at the way Christians were demonising Muslims in the lead up to invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. We all know demonising 'towelheads' and 'ragheads' is always an excuse to 'take them out' as soon as we get the chance.

So I went to the local mosque and said, 'Christians, Muslims and Jews all believe Abraham is the father of our faith, and we all believe our God is the God of Abraham. So rather than let the press play us off against each other, why don't we show our unity

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[2] Much of the material for this paper was drawn from my recent book *Out And Out: Way-Out Community Work* (Preston, Vic.: Mosaic Press, 2012). I also recommend Bob Robinson's book, *Jesus and the Religions: Retrieving A Neglected Example For A Multicultural World*, (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2012).

[3] Chris Marshall, *Compassionate Justice* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2012) 52.

by coming together for prayer. And to start that process, why don't I come and pray with you at the mosque on Friday?'

'Sure,' they said. So I did.

As the wars have stretched on, I have continued to work on dialogue between Christians and Muslims, trying to rebuild the relational bridges between our communities that the terrorists and propagandists from both sides blow up on the front pages of our newspapers every day.

As a Christian from an Anabaptist tradition I work on dialogue between Christians and Muslims on four fundamental assumptions.

1. All men and women are made in the image of God and have the law of God written on the hearts.

> God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
> - Genesis 1:27

> They (other people) show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.
> - Romans 2:15

For over a century representative from all the major religions in the world have been meeting in a Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions to cultivate harmony among the world's spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world to achieve a peace, justice, and sustainability.

The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR) dates from 1988 when two monks from the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago suggested organizing a centennial celebration of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago. The 1893 Parliament marked the first formal gathering of representatives of eastern and western spiritual traditions. Today, it is recognized as the occasion of the birth of formal global inter-religious dialogue.[4]

In 1993, the Parliament of the World's Religions was convened in Chicago, with 8,000 people from all over the world coming together to celebrate diversity and harmony and to explore religious responses to the critical issues, which confront us all. The representatives looked to see if they could find 'the law of God written on their hearts' that they could use as common multi-faith moral rule to address the issue of violence. And they found the famous Golden Rule: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'

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[4] *Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions*, http://www.parliamentofreligions.org (accessed 15 June 2013).

The Golden Rule	*Hinduism* 'Never do to others what would pain you' Panchatantra 3.104	*Buddhism* 'Hurt not others with that which hurts your-self.' Udana 5.18	*Zoroastrianism* 'Do not to others what is not well for oneself.' Shayast-na-shayast 13.29
Jainism 'One who neglects existence disregards their own existence' Mahavira	*Confucianism* 'Do not impose on others what you do not yourself desire.' Analects 12.2	*Taoism* 'Regard your neigh-bour's loss or gain as your own loss or gain.' Tai Shang Kan Ying Pien	*Baha'i* 'Desire not for any-one the things you would not desire for yourself.' Baha'Ullah 66
Judaism 'What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbour.' Talmud, Shabbat, 31a	*Christianity* 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. Matthew 7.12	*Islam* 'Do unto all people as you would they should do to you.' Mishkat-el-Masabih	*Sikhism* 'Treat others as you would be treated yourself.' Adi Granth

In Taoism the call is *descriptive*. 'Regard your neighbour's loss or gain as your own loss or gain.' In Jainism the call is *instructive*. 'One who neglects existence disregards their own existence.'

In Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Judaism and Baha'i the call is *imperative* and is framed *in negative terms*. 'Never do to others what would pain you.' 'Hurt not others with that which hurts yourself.' 'What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbour.' 'Do not impose on others what you do not yourself desire.' 'Desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.'

While In Christianity, Islam and Sikhism the call is *imperative* and is framed in *positive terms*. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' 'Do unto all people as you would they should do to you.' 'Treat others as you would be treated yourself.'

The great value of the Golden Rule is that it is acceptable not only to religious people, but also to secular philosophers like Peter Singer. 'Reciprocity,' says the Aussie philosopher 'seems to be common to ethical systems everywhere.' People of all religions – or none—all over the world know that—there are no short cuts; that there are no quick fixes; and that we cannot hope to develop community unless we 'do unto others as we would have them do unto us'.[5]

We have found we have been able to work with people of all religions – or none – based on the simple, essential, universally-acknowledged, Golden Rule that says we should 'do unto others as we would have them do unto us.'

However, with our Muslim friends we have been able to take this even further.

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[5] Peter Singer *One World* Text Publishing Melbourne 2002, 141

On the Occasion of the *Eid al-Fitr al-Mubarak,* 13 October 2007, a gathering of a wide range of Muslim leaders from a broad range of Muslim groups, organizations and denominations, wrote an open letter to leaders of Christian churches everywhere:

> Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity.
> The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity.
> … Thus in obedience to the Holy Qur'an, we as Muslims invite Christians to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is most essential to our faith and practice: the *Two Commandments* of love.[6]

What an invitation! This is an invitation that no sincere Christian should reject. Our Muslim brothers and sisters are calling us to practice what we preach: to practice that law of God written on our hearts—the love of God and the love of neighbour – which Jesus said was the 'greatest commandment'—together.

Not surprisingly, as soon as I heard about this invitation, I accepted it with thanks. It is the Common Word that guides dialogue we have with Muslims.

The Jews say that the 'law of God is written *on* our hearts' not *in* our hearts. And it only gets into our hearts when our hearts have been broken. It may be that it has taken the heartbreaking events of recent history to break our hearts open to this word. The challenge for us is to let it grow like a seed within us.

2. The Spirit is at work bringing order out of chaos and leading people into the truth in every situation we are in.

> Jesus said: when the Spirit of truth comes, he (sic) will guide you into all truth.
> (John 16.13)

When I was last in India, I met with Saniyasnain Khan, the son of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, a writer and editor for literature produced by the Muslim Centre for Peace and Spirituality in Nizammudin, New Delhi. I was telling him how disappointed I was so many Christians and Muslims were so judgmental of each other and so prejudiced

[6] An Open Letter (2007) A Common Word Between Us And You http://www.acommonword.com/

against each other. Saniyasnain responded immediately by saying, very gently: 'Dave, it is very sad. They observe the rituals of religion but they miss the Spirit that it at the heart of religion.'

Khan is right. It is the Spirit that is at the heart of religion. And unless we are attentive to the Spirit at the heart of religion, our religions will be heartless.

Some time ago I was talking with some Muslim friends about how we were trying to deconstruct and reconstruct our religion in terms of the Spirit. They said they were interested in doing it as well and asked if they could join us for a combined conversation about interpreting our religions in light of the Spirit.

When we got together, there were twelve Christians and six Muslims. One of them was a *hafiz,* which means he knew the whole of the *Qur'an* off by heart.

We invited them to share their spiritual journey so far. They said that as people who believed in a sacred text, the temptation for Muslims, like Christians, was to take a text out of context and use it as a pretext for any action they wanted to take in which they had some kind of vested interest.

As you can imagine, when the Muslims said this all us Christians nodded our heads in acknowledgement that we too were guilty of doing the same thing.

'So, have you found a way to interpret the text in the light of the Spirit?'

'Yes,' they said, 'we have.'

'What is that?' we asked.

'Well', they said, 'at the beginning of every *sura* (chapter) in the *Qur'an* except one, there is an invocation that goes *"Bismillahi r Rahman r Rahim",* which means, "In the name of God the most merciful and most compassionate". And we have come to believe we should use that invocation as a hermeneutic to interpret the text in the light of the Spirit. Thus to interpret the text in the light of the Spirit of God, all our interpretations must be consistent with the mercy and compassion of God – any interpretations that are not full of the mercy and compassion of God need to be challenged, even if enshrined in *sharia* law.'

'Wow!' we said. 'That's great!'

'Yes,' I said. 'I think what you are doing is great. But even more importantly, I think Jesus would think what you are doing is great; because he did exactly the same as what you are doing with the *Qur'an* with the *Torah;* including being willing to challenge interpretations of the law in the light of the Spirit!'

Last *Ramadan* I fasted and meditated on the *Bismillah* with my Muslim friends. The *Bismillah* stands for the Arabic phrase *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim,* the beautiful poetic phrase my Muslim friends referred to, which they say contains the true spirit of the Qur'an, indeed the true spirit of all religions.

I posted my reflections on Facebook, and the response has been fantastic. I was interviewed on Radio National. The Islamic Renaissance Front have said they want publish my reflections next *Ramadan*. And Mosaic Press has published a book titled *Bismillah*.

One *Ramadan* we organised an *iftar* (a meal to break the fast) with fifty Christians and fifty Muslims. We started with prayer then ate lightly spiced *halal* food and drank bright

sparkling non alcoholic drinks while some great local musicians played wonderful Middle Eastern folk songs in the background.

Mixed groups of Christians and Muslims sat around the tables and chatted about their lives, their faith and their values, celebrating their similarities and discussing their differences in a beautifully respectful and reciprocal Spirit.

Another *Ramadan* we decided that rather than have a meal together, we would provide a meal together for marginalised and disadvantaged people in our city. Some of us have been running a community meal with people with disabilities who live on the streets or in hostels or some of the boarding houses in our neighbourhood for more than twenty years. So we invited our Muslim friends to join us for a community meal after prayers one Friday night.

Our Muslim friends offered to serve the food. And they did. Then they moved out from behind the safety of the servery to sit and eat with the people whom they had served, who at times, I must admit, must have seemed a bit scary.

There was one particularly scary moment. A young woman in a *hijab was* going around the tables, serving food. I knew her well, we were good friends, but I had not shaken hands with her when I greeted her earlier that evening out of respect for Muslim traditions limiting male-female contact. As I watched her serving food at a table nearby, an older man with an intellectual disability leapt up from his seat and wrapped his arms around her to give her a big hug.

I was looking over his shoulder into her eyes. And I saw the look of dismay in her eyes, at this man embracing her publically, shaming her publically, like this. Then I saw the dismay melt away, as she remembered his disability and she realized he was not being offensive, but being effusive in the expression of his appreciation, oblivious to any shame that he had inadvertently caused. And, as I watched on, I saw her graciously return his innocent embrace.

That is the Spirit at work—full of the mercy and the compassion of God.

3. Jesus is already with people – 'Christ-ians' and 'non-Christians' alike—whether people know it or not.

> 'For by (Christ) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created *by him and for him, and in him all things hold together*.'
> (Colossians.1:16-17)

> 'Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not put it out it… *the true light that gives light to every person coming into the world*.'
> (John.1:3-5,9)

When I wanted to launch my *Plan Be* Series – three books I'd written on the Be-Attitudes as Jesus' framework for his blessed personal-political revolution – I asked a Muslim friend, Nora Amath, the Director of Amarah (Australian Muslim Advocates of the Rights of All Humanity) to introduce *Hey Be And See*, *Plan Be* and *See What I Mean* to a broad cross-section of a multi-faith community. And, with her permission, this is a report of what she said:

> When Dave asked me to say a few words about the series, I thought 'Yep,' I have heard Dave talk about the Beatitudes on a few occasions. 'Easy'.
> But when I read the books I couldn't put them down. I read them in two days straight. And it wasn't an easy two days.
> Don't get me wrong—the books were very well written, but they challenged me tremendously.
> A few weeks ago I was part of a dialogue at a local church and someone asked if I was a Jesus–following Muslim. And I replied with an emphatic 'Yes! Of course I am. Every Muslim has to be. It is part of our belief. Yes, I and other Muslims believe that Jesus was here on Earth to convey and invite people to accept God's message. Thus we are followers of Jesus'.
> But until I read Dave's books I really didn't know what that meant.
> Three books later, I do know what that line means—and I realise that I had a long way to go.
> …I believe the Beatitudes is an ethical framework able to transcend all religious boundaries because its core, its essence, is part of every religious tradition. This radical, transformative framework is universal and can be applied within whichever religious tradition one comes from.

No Christian friend I know could have witnessed more beautifully to Jesus than my Muslim friend, Nora Amath, did that night at our *Plan Be* launch.

When I got up to speak after her I was still bawling at the beauty of it all.

(Nora—who says 'You always cry, Dave.'—was gently laughing at me.)

4.Our role is not to try to convert people, but to witness to people – simply sharing with them what we know.

> Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and *you will be my witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
> (Acts1.8)

> Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."
> (Matthew. 5.16)

Some of us have taken Christ's call to 'witness'—to 'evangelisation'—as a call to 'proselytisation'.The goal of 'proselytisation' is for us to convince as many people as possible to join our cause. In seeking to accomplish our goal, we tend to treat people as faceless targets – 'potential trophies' for us to 'win'. We do not treat people as people. If we meet their needs, it is not so much to 'help them win', but to 'help us win them over'.

Christ advocated 'evangelisation'—sharing the good news of God's radical commitment to a sacrificial concern for the welfare of the other—but Christ totally repudiated 'proselytisation'—precisely because it did not demonstrate God's radical commitment to the sacrificial concern for the welfare of the other. (Matthew 23:15)

If we are to witness to God's radical commitment to a sacrificial concern for the welfare of the other, like Christ did, then—like Christ—we will need to totally repudiate all 'proselytisation'.

As I have already said, Jesus said the best way to witness is not by what you say, but what you do.

My friend Nora Amath's Mosque in Kuraby was the first one burnt down anywhere in the world after 9/11, so we have decided to reach out to all the faith communities around the Mosque, in the hope of negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding to affirm a working relationship committed to personal respect, mutual regard, community harmony in the way they witness to their faiths—and a willingness to address issues of concern that may arise.

It is hoped that this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will serve as an agreement between Faith Communities in Eight Mile Plains, Kuraby, Rochedale and Underwood in South East Queensland to affirm a working relationship committed to personal respect, mutual regard, community harmony in the way they witness and a willingness to address any issues that may arise. The purpose is to guide our efforts to live together peacefully.

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is not a legal agreement, but a moral agreement; does not limit the rights of signatories to participate in any other relationships, but articulates a shared commitment to work towards constructive relationships between our faith communities, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, etc; and provides a basis for collaborating in addressing issues of the wider community:

> By signing this Memorandum of Understanding, all parties agree to:
> Make an effort to relate respectfully to all people regardless of their faith.
> Listen to what others have to say.
> Not tell other people what they believe, let them to tell us.
> Respect other's views, even if we disagree with their views.
> Be honest and sensitive in what we say.
> Speak positively of our faith, not negatively of other's.
> Not try and force people to agree with our own views.
> Not treat people as a spokesperson for their faith
> Not judge people by what other people of their faith do.
> Acknowledge both similarities and differences between our faiths.
> Share our faiths with sincerity, transparency, mercy and compassion.

> Be honest, if an event includes sharing our faith. Not bait and switch.
> Serve without strings attached. Not exploit the vulnerability of people.
> Witness, but not convert. Never try to induce or coerce a conversion.[7]
> Respect the choices others make. Accept them without resentment.
> Encourage positive relationships between faith communities.
> Encourage constructive relationships with the wider community.
> Use our wisdom, knowledge, skills and resources to serve people.
> Discuss problems that arise face to face so we can solve them peacefully.
> Review progress annually to ensure our understanding is growing.

My friend Greg Manning and I have set up a Christian inter-faith group called Misbah and Nora and her husband Halim Rane have set up a Muslim human rights group called AMARAH (Australian Muslim Advocates of the Rights of All Humanity) and together we have hosted a series of inter-faith conversations with groups of people from a diverse range of various faith communities.

Questions from Other Christians

When I talk to Christians about my interfaith work, there are always two question that they ask me—sometimes gently; sometimes not so gently.

One question is: 'What about being unequally yoked?' The difficulty Christians have in working with people of other religions is that we are 'Christians': we believe in the unique-yet-universal significance of Christ, our Saviour, who we believe is God's 'full and final revelation of truth'. And, that being so, most of us find it difficult to work together with people of other religions – or none – who do not acknowledge Christ in the same way. I know, I was brought up in a church where I was taught I should not—under any circumstances—become 'unequally yoked with unbelievers.' (2 Cor. 6:14)

One way I answer this question is to say. 'They are not unbelievers. They are believers. Its just that they don't believe the same as we do about Christ.'

'That's the point,' they say. 'Non-Christians don't believe Jesus is the "Son of God".'

I say: 'But when Jesus called his disciples to "be with him", none of them believed he was the "Son of God". It was only after "being with him" over an extended period of time, they came to realize who he really was. Jesus didn't make a belief in him as the "Son of God" a precondition. Why should we?'

Which brings us to the question: 'What was the pre-requisite Jesus gave his disciples as a precondition for working collaboratively with other people?' My answer to that question is: 'Peace'. When he sent his disciples to work with other people in other towns and villages, he simply told them to look for a person of 'peace' to be with and work with. And, as men and women of 'peace', my Muslim friends more than meet that prerequisite.

The other questions is, 'Dave, do you believe Jesus is "The Way"?'

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[7] Conversion is the work of God. It is not ours. And we can do great disservice if we try to do God's work ourselves

This is a reference to a saying of Jesus who said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' (John 4.16)

My answer to the question is: 'Of course I believe Jesus is "The Way". But Christians often neglect "The Way" Jesus related to people in other religious traditions, forget "The Truth" Jesus embodied that cannot be contained by any religion, and ignore "The Life" Jesus offers to all people, even 'non-Christians'

Jesus was aware of our prejudice against people of other religions and went out of his way to help people see others—especially 'strangers' with 'strange' beliefs and behaviours—as people made in the image of God.

What is the moral of the story Jesus told about the Good Samaritan?

One answer is: 'We need to show mercy to others.'

Yes. But there is more.

Another answer is: 'We need to show mercy to people of other religions.'

Yes. But there is still more.

Still another answer—and one closer to what Christ was getting at—is: 'We need to realize that sometimes "The Way" indeed "The Only Way" we are going to learn about showing mercy to people of other religions is if we are taught to do so by a righteous stranger from a religion other than our own'.[8]

Miroslav Volf, is a Croatian. And his family, along with hundreds of thousands of others in the former Yugoslavia—Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia—have been torn apart by civil war, and what has come to be known as 'ethnic cleansing'.

Volf says that to embrace the way of Christ, is not a way to exclude others as others eg as Non-Christians. Quite the contrary. He says that *to embrace the way of Christ is a way of embracing others like Christ did—a way of including those that are usually excluded – even by—perhaps especially by—Christians.*

Volf says that 'a refusal to embrace the other, in her otherness, and a desire to purge her from ones' world by ostracism or oppression, deportation or liquidation, is an exclusion of God; for our God "is a God who loves strangers!"'

Volf says some say 'too much blood has been shed for us to live together.' But, Christ calls us to embrace the other, because the 'only way to peace is through embrace.'

An embrace always involves 'a double movement', Volf says, 'of *aperture* and *closure*.' 'I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. The open arms are a sign of discontent at being myself only, and of a desire to include the other. They are an invitation to the other to come in and feel at home with me, to belong to me.' 'In an embrace I close my arms around the other—not tightly, so as to crush her, or assimilate her forcefully into myself; but gently, so as to tell her that I do not want to be without her in her otherness'.

[8] It is significant that Jesus commended only two people for their 'great faith' and both of those people were people of other religions, not his own – the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matthew15.28) and the Roman centurion (Luke 7.9)

'An embrace' Volf says 'is a *sacrament* of a (Christ-like) personality. It mediates the interiority of the other in me, and my complex identity that includes the other, a unity' in diversity'.[9]

It is 'a microcosm of the new creation' Christ envisaged.

Afterword

Chris Marshall—a theologian who is a part of our Anabaptist Association of Australian and New Zealand – who puts its as well as anyone I know, says: 'The deliberate fostering of interpersonal relationships across opposing group lines is such a powerful, though underappreciated, tool for conflict transformation. Arguably the best (and perhaps the only) way to initiate change in the consciousness of mutually hostile groups towards peaceful coexistence is by the building of one-to-one friendships among individuals from both sides.

> Such relationships, by their very existence, complexify reality and disallow the wholesale "demonizing" of the other group. Just as the impact of collective violence is ultimately experienced by individual actors and disseminated through networks of personal relationships, so the impact of individual acts of peacemaking can accumulate over time and spread through relational networks that tie communities together, until a tipping point is reached and society-wide shifts in consciousness occur. As stories spread of opponents "acting out of character", they erode the foundations of prejudice and stereo-typing upon which centuries-long structures of animosity often rest.'[10]

[9] M Volf, 'Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of Ethnic Cleansing', in W Dyrness, (Ed) *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1994, pp. 27, 32, 39-40

[10] C. Marshall Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime and Restorative Justice Eugene: Cascade, 2012. p52-3

A (Recovering) Racist's Reading of Matthew 15:21–28

Matt Anslow

Christ and the Canaanite Woman Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (ca. 1650)

The topic of neighbourliness in a multi-faith world is without doubt an important and relevant one. Following on from the most violent century in history we find that humanity has learned little, at least in practice, in regard to its potential for evil and it's aversion to diversity, religious or otherwise.

For Christians the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 may provide a tool for shaping a Christian approach to being neighbours in a pluralistic world. First, however, I think it necessary to briefly explore the nature of our practices of "exclusion" in a multi-faith world. To do this I want to appropriate the writing of Croat theologian Miroslav Volf and his important study of the issue of identity and otherness. I then want to ask the question *how can a Christian speak of being a neighbour in a world of many faiths?* Only from there, I think, can we move on to the focal point of Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman.

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The issue of being neighbours in a pluralistic world is one that is close to my heart, and relevant to my past. Until relatively recently I lived one suburb away from Cronulla Beach, the site of one of Australia's most shameful displays in recent memory. I grew up accustomed to casual racism, living in a white enclave as I did. I can remember many times in my past having accommodated implicitly racist comments, or having made them. It was normal amongst basically all those who surrounded me as I grew up.

For me it was only the implications of the Gospel that forced me to repent of my indifference and collusion with racism. I'm not sure how many others feel this, but the internal struggle is not won despite my change of mind and heart. Every so often I catch myself thinking things that disgust my anti-racist sensibilities. In the car, on the street, in the lounge room: My thoughts are often invaded by racism and I must constantly be on guard to take these thoughts captive. As much as I would like to be liberated from any forms of such prejudice, I am forced to say I am a recovering racist.

Now, we have come together to discuss being neighbours in a multi-faith world. Why, then, am I speaking of racism? Certainly a notable area of conflict in today's world, like in periods of the past, is that of religion. In 2010 Minority Rights Group International reported that religious intolerance has now joined racism in many parts of the world as the leading cause of the persecution of minorities.[1] Though issues of faith and religion are the focus of this conference, I would argue that the root of religious intolerance is the same as conflict based on ethnicity, race or language. This is not to deny that they are different things, or to negate the complexity of the issues, but simply to say that the basic root is the same. What then is at the root of such "exclusion", as Miroslav Volf calls it?

The Cronulla riots of late 2005 were, at least on the surface, an attempt to assert a geographical claim over-against outsiders—"This is *our* beach." But the Australian flags being worn as capes or tattoos and the white supremacist tracts being distributed on the day pointed to something deeper than a dispute over use of beaches. Cronulla was merely a microcosm of the greater issue that confronts Australia as a whole, as well as many other places across the globe.

The riots were not an accident. They were not the unfortunate result of coincidence, alcohol and Alan Jones. They were the predictable result of a local culture that had come to esteem itself over-against all others. "God's country" is the self-appointed designation of those living in "The Shire" where Cronulla is located. Though not many residents would consider themselves racist, racism comes in many forms, most of them softer than is often recognised. "The Shire" culture continues to thrive on the exclusion of outsiders, since outsiders both upset the comfort afforded by the dominant mono-cultural order and represent an inherent challenge to one's identity.

And *identity* is the crux of the issue. What do rioters in South-East Sydney have in common with, say, snipers in Sarajevo, skinheads in Berlin or soldiers in Darfur? What is

[1] "State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010," *Minority Rights Group International Annual Report* (2010).

at the root of the Islamophobia or the so-called "New Racism" rampant in the West? What fuels most of the forty-plus major conflicts currently being waged in our world? Racism, religious intolerance or whatever cannot be the answer, since they are fuelled by some deeper force. Is this force not, at least in some major part, the issue of identity and otherness? As Miroslav Volf suggests, do not cultural "cleansings" demand of us "to place identity and otherness at the centre of theological reflection of social realities?"[2]

Despite the increasing technological and economic connectedness of humans across the globe we have not learned to appreciate the diversity of human culture and character. If anything our growing awareness of cultural heterogeneity has opened up *more* criteria for enmity. Thus Miroslav Volf makes the following claim:

> It may not be too much to claim that the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference. The issue is urgent. The ghettos and battlefields throughout the world—in the living rooms, in inner cities, or on the mountain ranges—testify indisputably to its importance.[3]

While this is a significant claim, it is not without good reason. There are of course other areas of reflection that are crucial in our present moment—human rights, economic justice and environmental well-being come to mind. But according to Volf, identity should join them at the centre of theological reflection since what rights, justice and environmental well-being mean will depend on the culture and identity of the person reflecting on them.

In that sense we all come to the table with a situation from which we reflect. The implications of this plurality are important, since we are all coming with a differentiated existential basis. In my limited experience of multi-faith dialogue the focus has too-often been on exploring similarities whilst (unintentionally?) setting aside differences. While helpful in certain circumstances, the truth is that the aim of relationship is not to transcend difference, but to love the person *who is different*.

(Imagine you and your partner seeking the help of a marriage counsellor and being told you could solve your problems by ignoring your differences and focusing on what you have in common.)

If religious fundamentalists have focused too much on difference, then perhaps ecumenicists have too-often committed the opposite error. Ignoring difference is to do violence to the other, never truly loving them for who they are. Such engagement waters down my identity as well as yours, diminishing us both. By doing so we never can disagree about our differences because our "peace" is based on ignoring them. But true love, which allows difference and disagreement, opens the possibility for us both to be changed by one another.

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[2] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 17.

[3] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 20.

In truth one's identity, according to Volf, is constructed *in relation to the other*.[4] To be Australian is to enter a whole history in relation to Aboriginal people, or to be a Christian is to enter historical relationship to Jewish or Muslim people. It is not just healthy to engage those different from us: *it is inevitable*. For Volf the question is: When I assert my identity, necessarily drawing boundaries to define who I am, will I allow the other to inhabit my self, or will I slip into violence and try to reshape the other according to my will, either assimilating, dominating or eliminating, so that I can be who I think I want to be?

In light of the inescapability of situatedness I can only reflect *as a Christian*. As a Christian I attempt to reflect out of a tradition that is both similar and different to other religious traditions. Similar because, like almost all other religions, Christianity insists that one of the primary ethical imperatives on the faithful is to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).[5] Different because the central figure is Jesus of Nazareth: God incarnate who was born, lived, was crucified and rose again. There is a great need for not only dialogue between religions, but also *within* religions: as Christians we must reflect on what our faith means for us and our approach to those who are different from us. If I am being a faithful Christian then my approach to living as neighbours in a multi-faith world will reflect Christ. The Christian disciple aims to conform to the image of a God whose primary feature in the New Testament is his self-giving love in Christ. Appropriating the thought of Jurgen Moltmann in *The Crucified God*, in the incarnation and the crucifixion God makes space for us by readjusting his identity—God becomes human and is thus changed; God is killed and thus is changed. In these changes God opens himself to us in order to welcome us prior to any judgement about us. If I am being authentically Christian then I am following this model set forth in Christ—my identity is changed as I open myself up to those who are different.

In this way, and speaking more generally, my loyalty is not to my religious tradition and its structures. The problem we face in multi-faith relations is not that there are different social and religious structures, since as John Howard Yoder said, we cannot live without such structures. The problem is, in the words of Yoder, that these structures "have absolutized themselves and they demand from [us] unconditional loyalty."[6] Ultimately our loyalty as Christians lies not with Christianity, but with God. If I am not making space for others, whatever their belief, then I am sacralising some other aspect of my identity, including my religious identity. The desire for identity is of course healthy and good,[7] but it can turn into sin. As Wolfhart Pannenberg has said, the self can "become the infinite basis and reference point for all objects, thus usurping the place of

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[4] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 91.

[5] In a sense I could stop here, because that's all we really need to know about being neighbours in a multi-faith world.

[6] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 143.

[7] Volf notes that if excluding the other from our will to be oneself leads to violence against the other, then excluding one's *own* self from the will to be oneself leads to the "diffusion of the self", the damaging of the self and the passive allowance for the person to be sinned against. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 92.

God."[8] I must be a Christian whose sole allegiance is to God, whom all religious traditions understand to command love of neighbour over-against any other structure.

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It is only by acting on this basis that I can, as a Christian, begin to offer a reflection about multi-faith engagement that may be of worth. At this point I would direct us to an extremely pertinent text in Matthew 15:21-28:

> 21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

This episode is one that has caused much perplexity amongst Christians. What, precisely, is Jesus doing in this episode? What is Matthew conveying? This is my attempt at a coherent and faithful reading.

Modern audiences are often scandalised by Jesus' initial denunciation of the Canaanite woman. As a result there have been a multitude of interpretive gymnastic routines applied to the story to explain away this apparent prejudice. Some have suggested Jesus is testing the woman. Others have claimed he is testing his disciples. Others still have pointed out that when Jesus calls the woman a "dog" the Greek (*κυναρίοις*) is actually "little dogs" or "puppies", that is, domestic dogs.

But there is no indication in the text that this is a test; we cannot assume a sly wink from Jesus. Even if it were a test, it is a cruel one—this woman comes to Jesus asking him to deliver her daughter from a demon and he plays games in the midst of her distress. Moreover whether Jesus refers to a wild dog, or a house dog (puppy) is irrelevant; he calls the woman a dog, a well-known scorn used against Gentiles by Jews, attested to in later rabbinic literature. These "solutions" do not lessen the force of Jesus' insults.

There is no indication that this story is ironic. It simply appears, despite common Christian piety, that Jesus is in fact affected by the dominant social attitudes of the time—even he must struggle with them! What is it about this woman that could give rise to such

[8] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 2:261.

a struggle? Is it that she is Gentile? A woman? Poor? Frankly all of these things could be considered offensive. If there ever was a figure who could represent a composite of all the things local pride should stand against, this poor Canaanite woman is it!

In the midst of a culture of honour and shame, this woman coming before Jesus is an affront to his honour. As Ched Myers has said (of the woman in Mark's version of the story), "No woman, and especially a Gentile, unknown and unrelated to this Jew, would have dared invade his privacy…"[9] But as much as I revere the work of Ched Myers, I don't think this is the essence of the story, at least certainly not Matthew's version of it. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus is not in any way opposed to his ministry benefitting Gentiles (he has already healed a centurion's servant [8:5-13]; his genealogy contains Gentile women and the Magi who visit the infant Jesus are Gentile), women or the poor (his ministry has benefitted them throughout). Jesus has flouted the honour/shame mores of his culture at different points in Matthew's story—it seems that they are not a controlling concern.

What then is the source of Jesus' struggle? Having used Mark's version of the story as a source, Matthew takes things a step further. Whereas Mark calls the woman a 'Syro-Phoenician', Matthew says she is a Canaanite. This is an odd way to refer to the woman. First of all the term 'Canaanites' is present nowhere else in the New Testament.[10] Secondly Canaanites no longer existed. As Brian McLaren has jovially said, to call someone in Jesus' day a Canaanite would be like calling a contemporary Norwegian a Viking, or a contemporary Scot a Celt.[11] By referring to the woman as a Canaanite Matthew is evoking the history of Israel and its violent conquest of Canaan.

Jesus had surely read or heard this story many times as a Jewish boy growing up. No doubt in first century Palestine, with the strong nationalism that was present amongst many Jews at the time, this story was given a triumphalist interpretation. Deuteronomy 7:1–4 says:

> "When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, 2 and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. 3 You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4 for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

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[9] Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 203.

[10] Grant LeMarquand, "The Canaanite Conquest of Jesus (Mt 15:21-28)," http://www.tsm.edu/sites/default/files/Faculty%20Writings/LeMarquand%20-%20The%20Canaanite%20Conquest%20of%20Jesus.pdf, Accessed 17 January 2013. LeMarquand acknowledges the possible exception to this rule, but ultimately dismisses it.

[11] Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 155.

The woman Jesus encounters in Tyre and Sidon is not merely a Gentile: traditionally she is an enemy of Israel and God Himself. Her request of Jesus is striking, however. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."

Have mercy on me.

Compare this to Deuteronomy 7:2—"…you shall show no mercy to them." She is well aware of the history and, as one whose ancestors had been conquered, she begs for mercy where none had been given before. In other words, she begs for a reversal of the historical tradition.

In the face of this cry Jesus does not answer a word. His disciples implore him to tell the woman to get lost. Jesus simply tells his disciples that his ministry is to be directed toward Israel, who themselves are lost. Still, Jesus has engaged with Gentiles previously and it has not proved to be a problem. This woman is different however, and just as she is aware of the history, so too is Jesus.

She tries again—"Lord, help me."

Jesus responds with that comment so controversial to our ears, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Bread of course is not foreign to Matthew's story. Just verses earlier Jesus has fed five thousand men plus women and children with bread and fish (14:13–21). It is a beautiful image of God's providence for the people, and echoes the story of Israel in the wilderness being fed with manna. Those who are fed in the feeding of the five thousand story are, however, apparently all Jewish. The leftovers from this meal amount to twelve baskets, representative of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Later we have this Canaanite woman making a striking reply to Jesus' statement about bread only going to the children (i.e. Israel): "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." With this piece of self-deprecating humility, the woman challenges Jesus' understanding of his own mission; shouldn't the goodness of the God of all the world go out to all people? The result is astonishing. Jesus seems to have been converted by her—a masterful Jewish rhetorician beaten in a verbal challenge by no less than a Canaanite woman!

Following this encounter with the woman Jesus moves forth to enact his ministry amongst the Gentiles. He begins by healing the woman's daughter. He then heals many other Gentiles (15:29–31).[12] In Matthew 15:32–39 Jesus feeds another large crowd, this time four thousand Gentiles. Interestingly there are seven loaves left over. If there were twelve baskets left over in the previous feeding story and they represented the twelve tribes of Israel, what do the seven loaves here represent? LeMarquand suggests that they allude to Deuteronomy 7:1, quoted above:

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[12] The passage says Jesus is on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee when he performs these healings. I am convinced that this occurs amongst Gentiles. Certainly Gentiles lived in the region (the story does not say *where* along the Sea Jesus was located, though it was likely on the east side since in 15:39 he gets into a boat to head to Magadan on the west side). Perhaps more importantly the story reports that the people present saw Jesus' healings and "glorified the God of Israel." This construction "the God of Israel" occurs nowhere else in Matthew and strongly suggests the people doing the glorifying are not themselves from Israel.

> "When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you…"

In this feeding story God's providence, paradigmatically represented in the manna stories of Israel's past, is poured out on Gentiles. It is a reversal of history. It is a new type of conquest, not with swords but with bread.[13] This reversal of the antagonisms of the past seems to have been thrust onto the agenda by a lowly Canaanite woman who somehow knew that the God resident in the work of Jesus was wanting to pour out his providential care on *everyone*. What begins as crumbs becomes a feast for thousands according to God's love.

If the feeding stories in Matthew are echoes of the story of Israel in the wilderness, and if the story of Jesus walking on the water (14:22–33) is an allusion to the story of Israel crossing the Red Sea, then is not the story of the Canaanite woman a retelling of the story of Israel's confrontation with Canaan? If this is true, then is not this story one of subverting the Canaanite genocide tradition?

In Matthew 15:21–28 the Canaanites are not annihilated, they are healed and fed. Far from "showing them no mercy", Jesus comes to understand that his mission is in fact to pour out the Father's mercy on all, regardless of race, gender or anything else. The scope of Jesus' mission and his understanding of it is, I think, the central aspect of the story. He comes to understand that his identity must have make space for even the most distant "other", allowing them to change even him.

In this story we see that even Jesus is forced to confront the temptations to exclude according to cultural formulations of identity. Sometimes these cultural identities appear to be justified, even divinely so in the case of this story. At that time the ancient Scriptures had been understood in a way that caused many Jews to exclude people like the Canaanite woman on the basis of divine command. But what Matthew gives us is a story of confronting those narratives and subverting them. The Son of the warrior David is overcome by a lowly and desperate Canaanite woman, a supposed enemy of God. He is forced to make space for her, to overcome any remnants of a nationalistic temptation in favour of loyalty to God and God alone. As a result he is changed and turns the old narrative upside down.

In a sense this is a foreshadowing of the event of the cross. However where Jesus subverts the violence of his own people in Matthew 15, at the cross he subverts the violence of all people.

And we are left to follow after this Christ. If you are like me the temptation to make an idol of your own identity as it stands is ever-present. But like Christ we must learn to make space for "the other", to be visited by them, to hear them, and to be confronted by their humanity. Like Christ we must love in spite of difference. Peace through reconciliation: will we follow that call?

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[13] McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, 158.

Before the Conference: Choosing to Trust in God and Interfaith

Zalman Kastel

Zalman wrote this reflection on his blog before the conference - http://torahforsociallyawarehasid.blogspot.com.au

There is a myth about trust that it is just the natural consequence of a series of events that prove that someone is trustworthy. I think trust is about making a choice to trust someone or a group, it is given not just earned. In our teachings about our relationship with God, this approach plays out and I think it has application to interfaith relationships as well.

One of the great challenges of our time is the relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims and more broadly between people who have strong differences of belief. This is largely driven by generalising specific issues relating to some people, attitudes or events, with the groups as a whole, as has been well articulated by Waleed Aly.[1]

Trust as a choice

One key idea is that trust is demanded, withholding is insulting. I always think of the teenager who screams at his mother, YOU DON'T TRUST ME, before slamming the door. I wondered about that. Why is that an accusation? If your mother doesn't trust you doesn't that mean that you have failed to earn her trust?! Clearly that's not how it works. We can see that when a desperate parent will suddenly trust a child who recently got their driver's license more if they urgently need him/her to run an errand such as pick up something from the shops before the guests arrive.

The challenge of trust

Personal experiences and news stories from around the world and those horrible hate filled emails give plenty of reasons not to put my trust in my Muslim neighbour. A blood soaked history of Christian persecution of Jews as well as significant competition of ideas stand in the way of trusting my Christian neighbour.

Christianity grew out of Judaism and it is fair to say that some Christians would see their path as having superseded Pharisaic Judaism. Yet, I am a proud Pharisee Jew, explicitly so at least once a week, when almost every Sabbath I eat a hot Pharisee food called Tchulent to declare my agreement with the Pharisees in an intra-faith dispute from the time of Jesus. There was a view put that on the Sabbath we must eat cold food because of the prohibition against lighting a fire, but the Pharisees insisted that fire can be lit before the Sabbath and the food left on the fire. Yet this is the world of Rabbinic

[1] Waleed Aly, *People Like Us. How Arrogance is Dividing Islam and the West.* (Melbourne: Picador-Pan Macmillan) 2007.

Judaism that Christianity rejected. As a Tchulent eater, am I supposed to pretend that we are all on the same page?

Enemies

In Jewish tradition there are some quite harsh things written about enemies. This Saturday we will read how in the aftermath of an attack by Amalek following the Exodus from Egypt God commands Moses to write it down as a remembrance, put it into the handover file in the ears of Joshua, that God will erase the memory of Amalek from under the heavens…a divine war against Amalek for generations (Exodus 17:14-16), until the time of the Messiah (Targum Yonatan ben Uziel).

This Sunday I will be speaking at an Anabaptist conference in response to some pretty provocative ideas on the theme of peace-building. Of course my audience on Sunday believes that the Messiah has already come, and the time for hating enemies has past. Can I trust them to respect me despite my belief that the Messiah is not here yet? Can the people who have been taught one must love their enemies and those who have been merely taught to love their friends, really trust and respect each other?

Leap of Faith

I think faith in interfaith can draw some inspiration from the way tradition teaches us about faith in God. In our reading this week, the Israelites are both praised for their willingness to take a leap of faith "you're following Me in the desert, in a land not sown" (Jeremiah 2:2) and found wanting because of the weakness of their faith. God does not take them the direct route to the Promised Land because God thinks they might change their mind when they see war with the Canaanites and will simply return to Egypt (Exodus 13:17). This is the same God who decreed that they would be enslaved for generations in Egypt and has only now freed them. This is also the same God many Israelites were disappointed in when things got worse before they got better when Moses first approached Pharaoh. Surely God needs to build some trust first. Apparently not.

God gets more demanding. When the Israelites find themselves with the sea in front of them and the Egyptians behind them some cry out to God (Exodus 14:10-12); others, believing they are facing imminent death, lash out at Moses. Moses quickly tries to reassure the people then begins praying himself. God is not interested in prayers. He tells Moses "why do you cry to me? speak to the Israelites and they should travel!" Exodus 14:15).

But travel to where? Walk into the sea? The answer is yes. They were expected to show absolute trust in God and simply walk into the sea with confidence that it will turn out ok. Commentary suggests that it is only through this act of faith that they will earn the miracle of the sea splitting. We are taught that in fact one man named Nachshon does exactly that. He jumps into the sea and that is when it splits.

Jumping in to interfaith with my inspiring friends

Interfaith needs an element of Nachshon. All the arguments and differences both significant and trivial can be managed. What is required is good faith and a willingness to

choose trust. For me this is not always easy, but it is easier than for most. This is because of my friendship with some amazingly inspiring people of sincere good will. I am looking forward to catching up with some of them on Sunday.

After the Conference: Christian-Jewish Spiritual Connections and Barriers

Zalman wrote this reflection on his blog after the conference.

I was inspired and spiritually nourished this weekend at the Anabaptist conference. This is not a sentiment I would have dreamed, just a few ago, that I would ever write. In this post I reflect on the possibility of deep Christian-Jewish spiritual connection and conversation, my experience at the conference and how this relates to my own traditions particularly in the reading this week which includes the Ten Commandments. One obvious question relates to Christians beliefs about God and Jesus. I deliberately start with other matters, before addressing this.

The non-negotiable worth of every human being

At the conference the Multi-Faith panel was asked a question about condoning sin. Dave Andrews, a Christian Panelist, told a story about traveling to Cambodia and seeing sex tourists there for the purpose of exploiting young local girls and his anger about this. He felt like taking an AK47 and shooting them all. When he arrived back in Australia a woman asked him to counsel her husband who was one of these sex tourists. For Dave, this was a terrible predicament—how could he empathize with someone toward whom he felt disgust and outrage? Yet as a Christian he felt he must be there for this man. After much prayer and internal struggle to be true to the teachings of his faith and the example of Jesus he was able to care about him and hear his story. In the end this man who seemed repulsive told Dave his own story about how he was abused as a child, hates himself for what he was doing in Cambodia and was very eager for therapy to help him stop, which he went on to pursue.

This story has many levels and it is beyond the scope of this reflection to explore the terrible problem of sexual abuse itself and the proper responses to it. I was simply moved by Dave's living out his Christian faith in his compassion for a person he found it very hard to look at, never mind love.

The idea of the worth of every person is not unique to one faith. if I were faced with a dilemma with a bad person, my response to it would not be thinking about tax collectors and lepers; I think I would instead draw on Beruria's principle that "it is

written may sins be destroyed (Psalm 104:35) rather than the sinner."[2] The context of Beruria's statement was a problem with a group of thugs in her neighborhood which caused her husband, Rabbi Meir, a great deal of trouble. Rabbi Meir prayed that they should die. His wife Beruria persuaded him to differentiate between sins and sinners and pray for the elimination of the former. Her husband did pray for them, and they repented.

In our reading this week there is further inspiration to be drawn from the order of the Ten Commandments which is seen as significant. Five commandments were on each of the two tablets, this means that number 1, "*I am Y-K-V-K*[3] *your God*…" appears next to commandment #6, thou shalt not murder, because these two commandments are linked, to suggest that "spilling blood" is an offense against God himself just as smashing the statutes of a king or destroying his coins might be.[4] This can be seen in the language of the Torah "*One who spills blood…because in the image of God, He made man.*" (Genesis 9:6) Applied more broadly it is about the intrinsic non-negotiable value of every human being. Dave's showing love to this man resonated for me because it echoed compassionate teachings in my own tradition but I was also moved by the power of his own beliefs and stories playing out in his heroic struggle.

A Farbrengen with Christians

After the formal session I sat down at an outdoor table next to Dave Andrews. He is a man with a medium length white beard and very long hair, big glasses and a giant spirit. Slowly, we were joined by one man, then another, and another; eventually first one woman then a second also joined our previously all-male circle. The dynamic was similar to when an elder Chasid would sit down with a few others to tell stories and reflect, they would attract younger Chasidim around them to drink in the words and the spirit. There was usually some vodka on the table, which would be sipped with the word "Lchaim" to life and good wishes. This kind of gathering is what Chasidim call a Farbrengen. The difference was that this time the elder Chasid was not Jewish - he described himself as a follower of Jesus.

Do Not "Murder", killing on the other hand…

Dave wanted to know what the biggest dividing element between us was. It was a stream of consciousness kind of discussion rather than a formal debate or lecture. I reflected that the insistence on non-violence was a sticking point for me. The sixth commandment is often translated as "thou shalt not kill". Yet the Hebrew words תִּרְצָח לֹא lo tirtzaḥ, are more accurately translated as thou shalt not murder. In my tradition, despite the great value place on peace, violence is sometimes justified in the pursuit of

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[2] Beruria was one of the great wise woman of Jewish tradition; she was the wife of Rabbi Meir. Talmud: Tractate Berachot, 10a

[3] Because of the holiness of this name, the letter Hay, is pronounced as "K". It is written properly in a Torah scroll or Chumash.

[4] Mechilta, cited in Torah Shlaima p.100

justice and its defense. While I appreciate the radical transformational potential of an insistence of the sacredness and dignity of all people, I struggle with the idea that the allied soldiers who defeated Hitler could be seen as sinful. It also condemns Israelis regardless of how they might fight, even in situations where they are found to be acting absolutely in self-defense. Dave was particularly surprised by my answer. Was it not the idea of a man being God that would be the biggest problem?

Polytheism and the Jesus of Jarrod

Christian beliefs about the divinity of Jesus are a barrier for me. The idea of God incarnated as a human being does not sit well with my idea of what God is and I do not agree with it. Yet it is a known difference and one that for me is not a very important issue.

There is a Jewish authority that ruled that Christianity is not considered idol worship for a non-Jew because it recognises God. There are various teachings in Judaism that explore divine expression that go beyond the formula of the one invisible, indescribable, omnipresent, omnipotent creator God. We have Kabalistic teachings about divine expressions in human-like emotions such as kindness or (the drive to) victory. We are taught that the Shechinah spoke through the throat of Moses.[5] The Soul that God blew into Adam is believed to be a part of God himself.[6] For me the nature of God is mysterious. When I approach God in prayer, I am talking to the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" as they understood Him, but I am also talking to "the God of my Fathers",[7] which to me includes God as understood by my German-culture-loving great grandfather Dr. Armin, my Slovak-shopkeeper-great- great grandfather Aaron, my Torah- focused-scholar grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Yehuda, my devout American mother and my father ; all these differ. Mostly I try to pray according to "the mind of the young child"[8], suspending all speculation.

My greater problem with idol worship is when it leads us away from God and his demands of us, quite the opposite of what I witnessed at the conference. I see in people like Dave and my friend Jarrod McKenna a different Jesus, a Rebbe-like figure who calls them to compassion and struggle.

The second commandment states: There should not be for you, other god..." (Exodus 20:3) In Hebrew the words Lo Yi-hih-yeh, that mean there should not be, is a singular form, yet the instruction is about many gods so it should really say Lo Yi-Hih-Yu, (plural). This suggests that idol worship draws the worshipper in, even if at first the intention was to have one idol, in the end s/he will worship many.[9] This reminds me of the comment by a psychiatrist, obviously not very impressed with self-help books, that you will never find just one self-help book on someone's shelf, there will always be many, presumably because they all hold out the false promise of some great relief to life's

[5] Tikunei Zohar 38

[6] Tanya 1

[7] The Amida Prayer, Blessing 1

[8] Derech Mitzvosecha Mitzvat Tefilah

[9] Ohr Hachayim

challenges but in the end don't satisfy the reader who goes on to seek a fix elsewhere. I am sure this is not the case for all readers of these books, but I think there is a common thread about seeking escape from the anxiety caused by uncertainty in something concrete that we can hold or read and feel like we have something to hold on to. Similarly, idol worship is worst when it leads us away from the challenge to which God calls us.

Supersession vs Neighbourliness and Collegiality

I asked participants at the conference whether they believed that Judaism had been superseded by Christianity, in the way that a 386 computer is essentially obsolete because we now have faster, better machines. There was some thoughtful discussion about this. I think the key was that they were most interested in the teachings of Jesus rather than the founder of a new religion or brand to compete with "Brand Judaism". While we are all interested in truth, the focus is more on how we live truthfully than how to assert truth claims over other claims. Quite different to the sorting approach of sifting through falsehood to find the Truth that is reflected in our Torah reading where we read about Jethro exploring all known forms of worship known in his time to reject them all and convert to Judaism.[10] More like an argument between fellow Chasidim about whose Rebbe is the true Messiah and which teachings are most worth following. Whatever the case might be about supersessionism elsewhere, on Sunday I felt completely at home, accepted as a fellow seeker of God's way to peace and neighbourliness. Lchaim, to life.

[10] Mechilta

Interfaith Dialogue in the Philippines

Jon Rudy

In our "Religion: Peacebuilding in Multicultural Societies" course here at the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI)" we examined five different kinds of interactions or dialogues with persons of different cultures or religions.[1] MPI was formed in the crucible of the "All Out War" in 2000 by then President Estrada of the Philippines who sought a "final" solution to the long running war by the Islamic Bangsamoro of Mindanao. The war was countered by a group of NGOs who started MPI in the belief that the conflict transformation framework would offer nonviolent alternatives to seeking solutions through militarized means. Catholics and Mennonites started MPI which currently conducts week long courses every May that include the basics of peacebuilding in the first week and specialized courses like interfaith dialogue in the second week. I have been a facilitator at MPI since 2002.

The first is the dialogue is called the "dialogue life" where people live as neighbours, primarily concerned with daily interactions, the joys and sorrows that are the ebb and flow of life. Next is the dialogue of action or, as it is sometimes called, the dialogue of hands. Persons of different faiths work together toward a common goal perhaps addressing some kind of social problem. Buddhists and Christians building a house together at Habitat-for-Humanity would be one example. The third interaction is the dialogue of the religious experience where adherents actually experience each other's rituals, worship or celebrations. Participation in others' sacred spaces brings a deep appreciation and respect for the differences as well as uncovering commonalities. The fourth type is among experts, sometimes called the dialogue of the head. In this dialogue, "experts" interact round philosophy and theology of beliefs.

When people have dialogued long enough and respect for the other gains enough ground in the heart, then the fifth type of dialogue might occur, the dialogue of friendship and/or love. It is usually between two individuals who have developed the kind of friendship in which one would lay down the life for the other.

In our class at MPI we experience, in some little way, all of these dialogues as participants think through their sets of values and communicate those to the rest of the class. Grouping diverse persons together for class tasks, caucusing people in their respective religious groups to present their faith and attending worship at a mosque are all part of the various dialogues experienced during the week. Through working closely together, designing and co-facilitating the course with Alzad, an Islamic Scholar and now deputy Education Minister of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, he and I made progress toward the fifth dialogue.

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[1] I first encountered these five dialogues at the Silsilah Dialogue Moveemnt in Zamboanga, Mindanao. Run by Father D'Ambra, I am not sure if these are original to him or not. See http://www.silsilahdialogue.com/

In my work with conflict in Asia and Africa, a common missing element is respect. The various kinds of dialogue we both model and structure at MPI result in increased respect of one group for another. As one Seventh-Day Adventist participant told me after he had experienced transformation through engaging in dialogue, "now I call my Muslim brothers my friends."[2]

[2] See the video I produced about Pastor Dan at MPI in 2010. This is part of a larger resource developed by Lancaster Mennonite Conference called Sowing Seeds of Shalom. The video is found at: http://youtu.be/3923SFJH4kk?t=49s

A Letter from The Library of the Study Center for Mennonite Churches in Uruguay

Milka Rindzinski

Editor: A decade ago, Perth Anabaptist Fellowship (now defunct) ran a course on John H. Yoder's Politics of Jesus – a simplified version of it, and subsequently published the summary. I was surprised to receive an email from Uruguay recently and to learn that Milka Rindzinski has tranlated the simplification into Spanish. I asked Milka to write about the work of the Study Center.

Montevideo, July 6, 2013

Dear Nathan,

The Library of the Study Center for Mennonite Churches in Uruguay has had John H. Yoder's book *The Politics of Jesus* almost since it was published, as well as the Spanish version, entitled *Jesus y la Realidad Política*. But they had not been properly and popularly explored because, to be honest, the content was a bit dense for non-university level students—although not much less for universitarians, especially those without basic theological training.

So when I saw the simplified version produced by you and James Patton, I felt it would be good to translate it for use at grassroots level. It took me quite a while to do the translation, because I myself had to first understand well what Yoder said, comparing it with the English version, with the Spanish version, and examining the biblical texts and even quotations. I did not want to be "traduttore-traditore," as the saying goes.

I thought your idea of dividing the text into sessions, suggesting questions for discussion in groups on how to implement the Anabaptist vision shared by Yoder, which I think is the closest to what Jesus intended to convey with his message, with his life, and with his death. Another addition that I think was very appropriate was the glossary you added.

I had finished translating the material when we had the idea of inviting Robert Jack Suderman, of Canada, as one of the presenters at the 15th Assembly of the Southern Cone Anabaptist Mennonite Congress, in Chile, in January 2013. To make the most of the trip, after Chile he visited Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Colombia, offering seminars on the same subject: *'Biblical Foundations of Shalom'* which was in the same line of *The Politics of Jesus*.

In Montevideo, we mentioned to Suderman the simplified version of the book and he immediately asked for a copy for use with Spanish-speaking groups he regularly visits in Latin America.

In Uruguay, as well as other courses that we periodically take to churches, our Study Center organizes annually at least three or four full-day seminars on current themes. This year, our professor, Hermann Woelke, of Uruguay, is offering the simplified material in three of those seminars.

We hope that at some point so much interest may arise among our people that some will feel the need to organize into groups to study the material more profoundly and discuss and dialogue about ways to put the Anabaptist teachings into practice.

The vision of the Study Center in Uruguay is to promote Anabaptist Christianity, so almost everything we offer is directed towards that.

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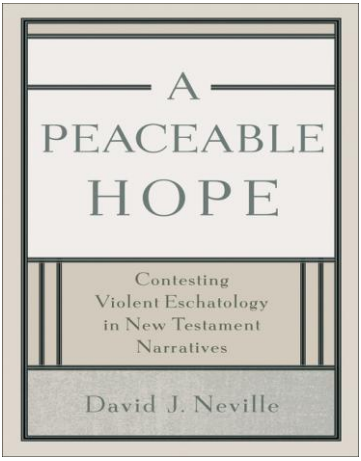
Reviews

David Neville, *A Peaceable Hope: Contesting Violent Eschatology in New Testament Narratives* (Baker Academic, 2013)
Reviewed by Mark Hurst



There is a growing viewpoint among Anabaptist writers that says if Jesus is the best representation of who God is then God must be nonviolent. This creates tension in reading parts of the Old Testament and particularly in some fairly violent texts in the New Testament. David J. Neville (PhD, Murdoch University) is associate professor of theology and lecturer in New Testament studies at Charles Sturt University in Canberra, Australia. He is the author or editor of several books. In *A Peaceable Hope* he takes on the challenge of understanding these New Testament texts in light of the nonviolent Jesus and his message.

Neville takes the reader on a journey through the narrative sections of the New Testament–the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation–with a view to developing a peaceable, as opposed to retributive, understanding of New Testament eschatology. He develops a "hermeneutic of shalom" for reading these texts and offers interpretive resources for grappling responsibly with them.

A back cover blurb from Dale C. Allison says:

> The notorious disjunction between the peaceable Jesus who commands love of enemy and the returning Jesus who brings punitive vengeance is here met head-on. Neville is historically honest, hermeneutically sophisticated, and personally candid. This is New Testament theology at its best and most helpful.

The book took me some time to read and I needed to have a Bible in hand to do it but the effort was well worth it. Neville does not solve all the problems presented by violent New Testament texts but he presents helpful ways for us to read these texts. In dealing with Matthew's violent eschatological judgement texts Neville writes:

> …how Jesus responded to violence and …what he taught his disciples with respect to violence is determinative. In other words, the story that Matthew tells contains within itself the wherewithal to deconstruct his own eschatological outlook. Thus part of the biblical interpreter's task is to desist from prejudging – and thereby pre-empting – the form that divine judgement might take. After all, when all has been said and done, divine judgement might turn out to display more of the Creator's inexhaustible creativity than anyone could have imagined. (44)

In his excellent chapter on John's Revelation Neville again encourages the reader to be open to surprise:

> We do not and cannot know how God might judge ultimately, but a christologically conditioned religious epistemology leads us to view that divine judgement is more likely to be restorative than strictly retributive. (240)

Neville finds a "single plot" theory of the Scriptural story "unsustainable" but he does see a "trajectory" in the Biblical story that leads to a "hermeneutics of *shalom*." (244) His "Concluding Reflections" chapter wraps up well his examinations of New Testament texts and spells out this hermeneutics of *shalom*.

He writes: "In line with the shalom-oriented canonical trajectory traceable from creation to restored creation via the historic mission of Jesus, there is a series of texts that I have come to regard as treasure texts." (253) Neville then shares his list of "treasure texts." I won't reveal his treasures but encourage readers to develop their own list of key texts and then compare them to his. (You'll have to buy the book first.)

I am always pleased when an author opens up a text in a new and surprising way that allows me to see something in scripture that I never saw before. Neville did that for me in his look at Luke 9:31. The verse is part of the Transfiguration story. In many translations it says Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about his "departure". Neville points out that a better translation of "departure" is "exodus".

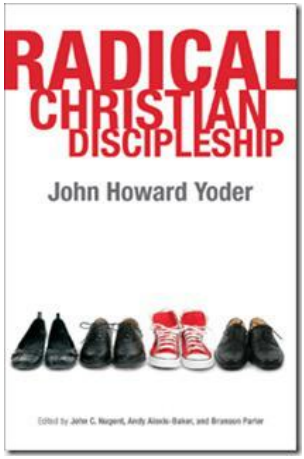
> To translate 'exodus' in Luke 9:31 as 'departure,' as is often done, is to overlook an important clue to the meaning of Luke's understanding of Jesus's journey to Jerusalem. The appearance of both the biblical personage, Moses, and the term 'exodus' in the same passage must be more than coincidental. (104)

That discovery made this book a bit of treasure for me.

Yoder for Everyone?

Radical Christian Discipleship **John Howard Yoder; edited by John C. Nugent, Andy Alexis-Baker, and Branson Parler (Herald Press, 2012)**
Reviewed by Nathan Hobby

The influence of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder (1927-1997) has grown since his death. Yet his published writings are mostly directed at scholarly audiences and both the structure of his thinking and the awkwardly revealing prose he used make his work inaccessible to the average Christian. This was why I wrote simplifications of two of his books, *Body Politics* and *The Politics of Jesus*, hoping to use them in small groups. Now there is a major project from Herald Press to popularise Yoder's writings in the new three volume series, *John Howard Yoder's Challenge to the Church*. This series collects Yoder's previously uncollected popular writings, including columns, sermons and other writings. It is a significant release for Anabaptists around the world.



The first volume is *Radical Christian Discipleship*; an accurate subtitle would be "Writings on the Shape of Christian (Non)Comformity", as this is the theme around which most of the pieces revolve. It is difficult to summarise a collection of pieces which were not written to fit together; themes and ideas recur in sometimes surprising ways, perhaps as one would find in a book of short stories, but there is not the sense of one central thesis being argued over the length of a book. Yet if anything could come close, it is the message in the very first piece, "A Choice of Slaveries", that the goal of Christian life is conformity to Christ and nonconformity to the world is incidental to that.

Yoder's message is typically unsettling. In "The Respectable Worldliness", he argues that even respectable concern for security is still idolatry; we must live as if all our money is God's money. In "Time and the Christian" he argues that 'the need for vacations has arisen in an age that no longer honors Sunday' (p.79). In "Love Seeks Not Its Own" he writes:

> Discussions about the ideal economic system are of minor interest for the Christian. What concerns us is living in love where we are. (p. 117)

It is a joy to witness Yoder's 'patient, untamed' mind (in the words of a book written about him) applied to everyday life. The shortness of some of the articles – four or five pages – makes them digestable and approachable. Yet it also difficult to hold in memory by the end of the book so many different arguments.

One of the joys and frustrations of Yoder is the way he touches on many things, alluding to or sketching controversial or radical ideas in passing, as something to be mentioned on the way to his main argument. Thus he offers a couple of comments on World War Two as a crusade (pp. 56-57) which I found deeply interesting, only to have him move on after a couple of lines. In another place, he argues that 'divine initiative and human responsibility cannot be disentangled' and that '[p]redestination is human freedom' (p. 177). Just as the reader might wonder if Yoder is Calvinist on this point, he asserts in the next paragraphs that '[f]or Jesus, damnation – for himself and through him for the universe was a live option' and suggests 'our eternal destiny and that of the churches in which we serve will hinge on today's faithfulness' (p. 177). He leaves us to disentangle just what he means and its consequences. Perhaps Yoder is irreducible – the experience of reading him and being confused, of seeing flashes of insight into other things is not just incidental but one of its great pleasures.

The other difficulty with this collection is the different and particular contexts in which they originally appeared. The writings stretch from 1954 to 1978 and many of them were addressed to Mennonites. Yoder is famously contextual, never addressing a general readership, but always the particular people he was writing for. This is evident in these writings, which mainly address the particular foibles of the American Mennonites and the social issues of the Cold War period. Almost everything Yoder has to say remains relevant in some way to readers today, but an act of translation is required, and it

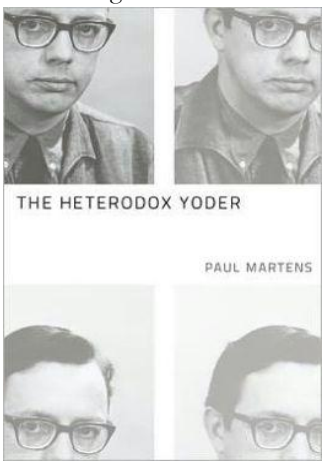
probably demands more of readers than they can do well themselves. The editors have provided some notes on context, while largely leaving Yoder to speak for himself. It's a difficult editorial call, but I would have preferred them to err on the side of more interference, giving us more of their insights into each piece, perhaps with an introduction or afterword to each piece clarifying some of the meaning or offering potential applications.

I will be interested to see how the 'average Christian' copes with this book and the others in its series. I believe it does make Yoder *more* accessible (and thankfully so many of his big ideas are contained, embryonically, even in this slim volume) but not so accessible as to put him in reach of the average Christian book buyer. I suspect that a true "Yoder for Everyone" book will have to be a secondary work, not using Yoder's own words but explaining his ideas in a simple and straightforward way; this will, of course, miss that surprising experience of reading him, but perhaps it could better prepare people for a book like *Radical Christian Discipleship*.

Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Cascade, 2012)
Reviewed by David Griffin

Some of the idiosyncrasies of John Howard Yoder are well known. For me, it was when he was a lunch guest at my own table. Being my guest did not stop him from giving me an embarrassing rebuke for what he considered to be an impolite way of addressing another guest.

Paul Martens notes some of Yoder's other ways, such as wearing a tie with a t-shirt during his undergraduate days. This behaviour, suggests Martens, points perhaps to a greater concern: Yoder's determination "to chart a path that no-one had walked before." Was Yoder a theological Trekky? Martens says yes: and the uncharted path Yoder trod was theologically heterodox.



After marking out his field of play, Martens spends four chapters covering Yoder's foundational theological commitments, politics, attitude to Jewish religion and ecumenism. In chapter six he concludes that "Yoder seems to leave us with a Jesus who has become an ethico-political paradigm that opens the door for a supersessive secular ethic." Simply put, Martens alleges that Yoder reduced the gospel to politics, so that even though he boldly went where no one had gone before, he belongs with the family of Kant, Hegel, Harnack, Ritschl and Rauschenbusch. Thus while not being heretical, he is definitely heterodox.

The two critical shifts Martens sees in Yoder are his groundbreaking 1972 *Politics of Jesus,* and the methodologically consistent use of governmental and secular language. This language elides classical theological concerns such as the Exodus and Pentecost. "There

seems to be nothing left to say that is not politics. Jesus is political; conversion is political; salvation is political; the eschaton is political." The problem lies more in what Yoder left out, and in his vocabulary, that in what he actually says. Yoder's Jesus is simply not unique.

This is supported, Martens states, by Yoder's argument that primitive Christianity was the original, and minority, messianic Jewish position. This was pacifist, and was the driving force behind sixteenth century Anabaptism, according to Yoder. Consequently, radical "sectarian" Christianity and minority messianic Jewish faith both share an ethical unity where practical moral reasoning is the final criterion of what constitutes true faith. This was developed throughout Yoder's long engagement with the Jewish philosophy professor, Rabbi Steven Schwarzschild. This extensive conversation is one example of Yoder's wide engagement with those beyond his confessional Mennonite family. His other broad engagement was with the ecumenical movement.

Twentieth century ecumenism was to a large degree a quest for Christian unity. Martens sees Yoder's efforts in this regard as centring upon an attempt to reframe Christian unity in sociological, that is, political terms, where theological language is quietly avoided. The traditional theological barriers to Christian unity such as the *filioque* and other confessional and credal matters become secondary. For instance, corporate worship generally and the sacraments in particular become community building social practices, not soteriological or doxological events. Unity in Christ is no longer a common confession about Jesus' identity, but common discipleship. The church becomes an alternative *polis,* not the *oikos* of God indwelt by the Spirit. No doubt all church practices are capable of being described in sociological terms, as are all human practices, but is this the language that the church and the NT itself uses? Is it simply reductionist, placing the church on the same linguistic page as the wider world, which Yoder himself sees as disordered? Has Yoder been linguistically colonised by secularism? Is Martens right?

There is no argument from me on the political and ethical focus in Yoder. He has rightly placed the humanity of Jesus and his first century Palestinian life on centre stage. In this he challenged the tendency of the majoritorian tradition, both Western Catholic and Eastern orthodox, to Docetism – the tendency to hide Jesus' humanity under his divinity to such an extent that it practically disappears.

But does Yoder deny the classical theological categories? In his *Preface to Theology,* he affirms such base theological affirmations. He utilizes Protestant orthodoxy's three-fold office as the major structure for his treatment of Christology. While not being uncritical of the Hellenism embedded in the two-nature Christology of the Chalcedonian Definition, he nonetheless sees it as a necessary clarification of Nicea. Yet even here he asserts that the NT stress is on Jesus' humanity, not his deity. So there is ambivalence. Chalcedon is understood as answering the questions of the day, that is, a strategic document necessitated by the *zeitgeist*. But is it more than strategic, does it express theological truth? That would appear to be Marten's concern.

It is here that I question Martens. Has he read Yoder's emphasis on politics and ethics wrongly? Is he looking for something in Yoder which Yoder himself did not care to write about – a clear articulation of classical theological categories? For instance, Yoder defended his use of middle axioms as a necessary method that enabled a critical

engagement with the world in language that it could understand. Like his appraisal of Chalcedon, this is an apologetic strategy. But did he *reduce* Jesus to such terms, thereby forfeiting claims to orthodoxy? Is Yoder's strategy identical to his theology?

Whatever may be the case, Yoder himself would probably not care, being a man happy in his own skin. In my own research I argue that Yoder does exhibit a "classical lack" which needs redressing, especially if his ethics is to have a deeper theological basis. But heterodox – I doubt it. In this I concur a little with Tom Finger and somewhat less with A. James Reimer, both North American Mennonites. Reimer in particular is critical of Yoder, and like Martens, a Canadian. Perhaps Canadian Mennonites take classical theology more seriously than their southern brothers. Yet none of this takes from Yoder his singular contribution to the church, one which the Reformed scholar Richard Mouw warmly acknowledged when he wrote the forward for Yoder's *The Royal Priesthood.*

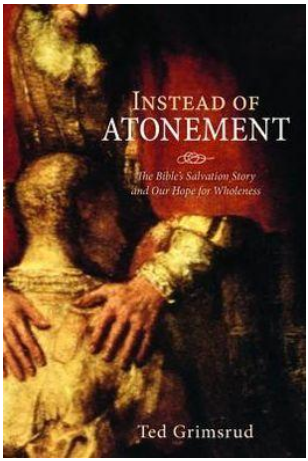
Martens' book, however, is important for Australian Anabaptists to read. A few years ago a friend of mine returned from a radical *cum* Anabaptist wedding and confessed with much dismay that all the conversation, even the public speech at the service, was about politics. Jesus himself appeared absent, strange for a tradition than places him central. It appears that Yoder's focus has been well and truly heard. Is it time to listen to a dissident voice from within his own tradition, one which considers him less of a saint and rather a mad and irascible uncle?

Ted Grimsrud, *Instead of Atonement: The Bible's Salvation Story and Our Hope for Wholeness* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013)

The author's website says the following about this book:

> Do atonement theologies that focus on Jesus' death underwrite human violence? If so, we do well to rethink beliefs that this death is necessary to bring salvation. Focusing on the Bible's salvation story, ***Instead of Atonement*** argues for a logic of mercy to replace Christianity's traditional logic of retribution.
>
> The book traces the Bible's main salvation story through God's liberating acts, the testimony of the prophets, and Jesus's life and teaching. It then takes a closer look at Jesus's death and argues that his death gains its meaning when it exposes violence in the cultural, religious, and political Powers. God's raising of Jesus completes the story and vindicates Jesus's life and teaching.
>
> The book also examines the understandings of salvation in Romans and Revelation that reinforce the message that salvation is a gift of God and that Jesus's "work" has to do with his faithful life, his resistance to the Powers, and God's vindication of him through resurrection.
>
> The book concludes that the 'Bible's salvation story' provides a different way, instead of atonement, to understand salvation. In turn,

> this biblical understanding gives us today theological resources for a mercy-oriented approach to responding to wrongdoing, one that follows God's own model.[1]



As one who enjoys biblical studies more than theology I found this book to be a refreshing contribution to the atonement debate that is raging in some parts of the church today. I get lost trying to sort out the different atonement models and the theologians who created them. But I love digging into the biblical story and looking for major themes that guide us in our life of Christian discipleship. This book is a great help.

Ted Grimsrud, Professor of theology and Peace Studies at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, admits he leaves many "messy" questions about violence in the Bible unanswered but says, "I chose rather to construct a positive case for the core message of mercy rather than to try to refute the counter-veiling evidence piece by piece." (234) There are other books that examine the "messy" bits but Grimsrud wants to paint the overall Biblical picture.

"The Bible's story itself from start to finish remains simple. God makes salvation available due to God's mercy – period." (232) Grimsrud shows through his re-examination of the Biblical story "that we do *not* find an atonement model in this story. The Bible's salvation story does not base salvation on Jesus's death…what was redemptive was the whole story." (233)

[1] http://peacetheology.net/books/insteadofatonement

Contributor Profiles

Dave Andrews recently released the book *Bismillah: Christian-Muslim Ramadan Reflections* through Mosaic Press. His website is www.daveandrews.com.au.

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