

ON THE ROAD

Journal of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand

No. 51, December 2011



Women's Issue

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From the Editor

Nathan Hobby



When I was an undergraduate, the student newspaper had an annual women's issue. The reasoning was that because there was still further to go to achieve equality between men and women, it was important to give dedicated space to women.

The rationale for this issue is similar; there is even further to go before equality in the church. Even in the Anabaptist Association, where we can assume there is general agreement with egalitarianism, *On The Road* is dominated by men. This issue creates some space, then, to encourage more women to contribute. My hope is to bring more women's voices into the conversation on an ongoing basis.

The view from Ephesians 4

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

Mark and Mary Hurst, AAANZ staffworkers



We just returned to Sydney from a trip to Queensland. Reflecting on the theme of 'women', this issue's theme, we came up with the following random thoughts:

We stopped and visited the Danthonia Bruderhof on our way north. The role of women in that community is very proscribed; what they wear, what they do, and what career options are open to them are all set out in clear gender-specific rules. It is different from what we are used to and we do not think we could live with those rules but the women there, at least outwardly, seem happy with their roles and find their lives fulfilling.

While in Brisbane, we attended an Anglican church on Sunday whose parish priest is a woman. This would not happen in Sydney. At a gathering where we spoke about community, we met people from two new emerging communities in the Brisbane area. The key people in both new efforts are women.

We visited a resort on Moreton Island for some holiday time. When filling out the check-in registration forms for ourselves and our daughter Moriah we

were asked for our title – Miss, Ms, Mr, etc. We do not usually use formal titles for ourselves but Mark filled in 'Rev' for each of us. It is not often when you have three Rev's in the family, particularly when two of them are women.

The first AAANZ Mailing on our return had several articles about women and peacebuilding. The next film we are going to show in our peace and justice film series at Avalon Baptist Peace Memorial Church is Pray the Devil Back to Hell featuring the work of one of this year's Nobel Peace Prize winners Leymah Gbowee.

Leymah is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite University's conflict transformation programme where many students and lecturers are gifted women.

We have been praying for people to come and join us in our 1643 Community. Today we got the news that three young women are moving in on Saturday.

Women. Key people in community. Key people in the church. Key people in peacebuilding. No wonder Jesus spent so much time hanging out with women.

Women on a Road of Change

President's Report

Doug Sewell, AAANZ President



Australia and New Zealand both marked the United Nations campaign to stop violence against women by holding White Ribbon Day on Friday 25th November. Conservative estimates suggest a figure of one in five women in Australia suffering some form of physical or sexual violence during their lifetimes with devastating affects on their health and wellbeing, as well as on their families and communities. In New Zealand one in three women are victims of violence from a partner, while on average fourteen women are killed each year by a member of their own family.

Rashida Manjoo, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, describes the international scene. "Whether it occurs in times of peace or conflict, the various forms and manifestations of violence against women are simultaneously causes and consequences of discrimination, inequality and oppression." Highlighting the slow progress in women's rights, she says, "Many States repealed discriminatory legislation and have enacted gender equality laws, but still challenges remain with respect to implementation."

This issue of *On the Road* looks at women, women and theology, women in the church and also women and justice. Theology, church and war have been areas with a traditional masculine bias. Men wage war, the church is still run by alpha males, and God is called a He.

I was brought up in a family with three sons, with me the middle brother. My mother had to contend alone with the avalanches of testosterone. You would be right thinking that I had a lot to learn about women. The tables have turned and I now have four daughters

and live in a family where I'm the only male. Even our silky terrier, Bonnie, and Gizmo the guinea pig are female. A balanced mastery of my so-called masculine side when my feminine side was plainly lacking remains a struggle.

So I am hardly the right person to introduce a theme as important as that about women, unless you consider my being one of a minority helps me to better understand how many women feel. But hang on; I can as a man make a direct contribution. One small act was to add my name to the White Ribbon Campaign Oath: never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women.

And whilst violence against women, the campaign says, is a deeply personal issue for women, it is also very much a men's issue because it is their wives, mothers, sisters, daughters and friends whose lives are being harmed by violence and abuse.

It is a men's issue because, as community leaders and decision-makers, men can play a key role in helping to stop violence against women. It is a men's issue because men can speak out and step in when male friends and relatives insult or attack women. And it is a men's issue because a minority of men treat women and girls with contempt and violence, and it is up to the majority of men to create a culture in which this is unacceptable.

I am hopeful that this issue of *On The Road* will add a strong voice calling for a way of living that advocates for the dignity of all people and seeks to correct the injustices of the past and present, especially for women. Women are on a road of change that has now been for a long time coming.

Rachel and Leah – rivals or partners?

Jeanette Mathews



There are a lot of interesting stories about women in the Bible. I once preached a series of sermons on this topic and easily ran out of weeks in the series before I'd exhausted the material available. But sometimes one has to dig deeply, or read between the lines, to be able to use such stories to celebrate the contribution of women to the Bible, to our faith, and to the presence of God in the world. Despite a few attempts to postulate female writers of some biblical books (arguments have been put forward for female authorship of Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Luke, Hebrews) and the strong possibility of female composition of songs such as the Song of the Sea (Exodus 14), Deborah's song (Judges 5), Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2) and Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), it is clear that the vast majority of the Bible was written through a patriarchal lens. Women's stories predominantly serve to further men's stories. The

story of Rachel and Leah is a prime example of this tendency.

Rachel and Leah in the Genesis story – competing to produce sons.

A frequently used biblical motif is the conflict between pairs of characters, especially in the narratives of the Old Testament: pairs such as Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, David and Goliath. Usually the conflict results in a decisive victory to one of the pair. In theological terms, the victor is the one who has God's favour. Admittedly, often this is against all odds – the one with God's favour is the younger, or the least regarded, or has been unjustly treated before being raised up and vindicated. But there is still an assumption of conflict and the need for loss or victory behind the stories.

This pairing can be seen amongst women characters of the Old Testament too, and again they may be paired in terms of winners and losers. Sarah and Hagar, Ruth and Orpah, Esther and Vashti, and probably the most famous pair: sisters Rachel and Leah. Their story stretches from Genesis 29 to 35, and while they sometimes seem to work together in partnership, the story highlights the birth of their children at the centre of the story and seems to present them as rivals in this. In fact, these birth stories are the beginnings of the twelve tribes of Israel and some commentators view the origin of the ongoing antagonism between the tribes in this rivalry of the sisters. Like mothers, like sons. In the perspective of the most straightforward reading of biblical history Rachel is ultimately the “victor” in *this* conflict but the circumstances of the story of Rachel and Leah favour them turn by turn, with first one gaining the upper hand then the other.

We are introduced to Rachel first, and she would certainly be voted the one “most likely to succeed.” Her beauty was legendary, while Leah, we are told, “had soft eyes” (Genesis 29:17). People have tried to explain why Jacob wasn’t attracted to Leah by translating that she had “weak” eyes, but it is hard to know exactly what the Hebrew text means. Jacob met Rachel at a well, a favourite setting for betrothal scenes in the narratives of the Old Testament. It seems he was smitten by her, and offered to work seven years to earn her hand in marriage. Nonetheless, Rachel was second born, so her father tricked Jacob into marrying Leah first, then defended himself by quoting the custom of primogeniture. Until now the Jacob stories had overturned such customs – Jacob himself was favoured over his older twin. But in the story soft-eyed Leah is presented to Jacob as his bride – giving her victory in Round One. Eyesight might have been a weakness for her, but being veiled from the prospective groom’s sight worked in her favour. There is an obvious narrative link to the trick Jacob played on his own blind father to gain a blessing in the place of his older brother Esau. Perhaps some poetic justice is at work. After only a week, however, Jacob was granted Rachel as his second bride and, we are told, “he loved her more than Leah.” Round Two to Rachel.

The love of a husband is an important thing, but less so in the days where production of male offspring was the primary purpose of a woman’s existence. As the competition between the two wives begin, Leah quickly gains the upper hand again. It is even put in theological terms – “when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren” (Genesis 29:31). The all important first-born son was Leah’s victory to savour, and indeed she

named him in those terms. The name Reuben meant “see, a son” (we are going to learn a bit of Hebrew!). That round went to Leah, but wasn’t a straightforward victory. Her hope that it would win Jacob’s love was thwarted, despite three more sons in quick succession. It is a fascinating passage to read, but notice the naming of Leah’s fourth son. It marks a transition both in her relationship to Jacob and to God – Judah was named because “this time I will praise (*hoday*) the Lord” (Genesis 29:35). It seems that winning her husband’s affection eventually became secondary to her own gratitude to God for the gift of motherhood.

Rachel, however, hadn’t achieved much in this competition. In order to gain the upper hand she resorted to underhand tactics! In a quite legitimate move in biblical terms Rachel offered her handmaid Bilhah to Jacob as a surrogate, and then helped deliver the child so that it could be considered hers. (You might remember that Sarah used Hagar for the same purpose earlier on – see Genesis 16:2.) At last *Rachel* had the opportunity to name a son to describe her experience – and note the interesting name of Dan (“God has judged”). In legal terms she had just won another round. After a second son to Rachel through Bilhah, Leah is again drawn into the match, although it seems her motivation is competition with her sister now rather than winning the favour of their husband. All this striving between Rachel and Leah has a faint echo of the long struggle between Jacob and Esau. Gaining the birthright didn’t end the competition for Jacob, in fact he lived for years in fear for his life at the hand of his brother. The parallel is made explicit in Rachel’s naming of her second surrogate son Naphtali – “I have wrestled (*niphthal*) with my sister and have prevailed” (Genesis 30:8). The same language is used in Genesis 32 where Jacob has a wrestling match at Jabbok with an unknown assailant as he fearfully anticipates a meeting with his brother. The concluding statement in that story is “you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:28).

Leah re-enters the competition by offering *her* handmaid to Jacob, and has the happy (*asher*) fortune (*gad*) of rearing two more sons. This makes Rachel all the more desperate, bargaining with her sister for mandrakes in the hope that they would magically create fertility. Apparently mandrake roots look like a newborn baby and so were considered a fertility charm. (If you’ve read or seen the second Harry Potter story you’ll remember them potting the mandrake plants – JK Rowling obviously knows her Ancient Near Eastern folklore!) Rachel’s victory in this round is long delayed, however, as Leah had three more pregnancies in the interim, producing another

two sons and then a daughter. Finally, we are told, “God remembered Rachel ... and opened her womb” (Genesis 30:22). In the competition interpretation of this story Rachel is the victor of this round as Joseph, the son she bore, became Jacob’s favourite and was most favoured by God as the story continued. It was not a total victory in the Bible’s grand narrative, however, since the significant line of King David that led to the Messiah came from Leah’s son, Judah. It’s interesting to reflect that the one who was specially blessed in that way was the one whose name *didn’t* reflect the struggle between Rachel and Leah.

A bitter–sweet victory

This conflict seems to end at the point of Rachel’s motherhood, although we hear much later of Jacob’s request to be buried in the family plot alongside Leah rather than beside Rachel who died “on the road” (Genesis 49:29–31), giving a lasting historical triumph to Leah. But victory after death is not as sweet as victory in life, so from Leah’s and Rachel’s point of view it is the younger sister who ends up on top. However, in my opinion, one of the saddest things recorded in the Bible is Rachel’s final earthly loss. The family had acted more co-operatively in the face of threats to their well-being: first Laban their father, then Esau the brother of Jacob. They were still looking for a place to settle and were travelling toward Bethlehem when Rachel went into labour for a second time. It was a difficult and ultimately fatal labour for Rachel, making her earlier statement “give me sons or I die” a sadly ironic request. But before she died she heard she was giving birth to another son. The text tells us that “she named him Ben-oni” – “son of my sorrow” (Genesis 35:18). All of the sons of Jacob had been named by their mothers according to the circumstances surrounding their birth, and “son of my sorrow” was an apt choice of Rachel. In the same verse, however, we read “but his father called him Benjamin” (“son of my right hand”). Rachel’s dying wish was ignored by her formerly devoted husband.

Despite the optimistic expectations we might have had for this beautiful and much loved woman, as Rachel’s name lives on in Israel’s story it is the sadness and pain of her experiences that seem to be remembered. In the prophets we read of her symbolic status as matriarch of the exiled northern kingdom when we are told “Rachel is weeping for her children who are no more” (Jeremiah 31:15–21) and the New Testament takes up this image of tragic motherhood when recounting the massacre of

innocent children by Herod following the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:16–18).

From whose perspective is the story told?

This is a sad story – especially as it sets up sisters as rivals which seems to continue on through the next generation. But let us look at it another way. Is the real tragedy of it that it is a story told through a patriarchal lens? After all, much of the Old Testament has this bias. The central concern of the story as it is told in Genesis is maintaining the position of Jacob and the honour of the family through the successful production of twelve male heirs who would become the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. The primary place of the women in the story is to be the mothers who give birth to the children, underscored by the meanings of their names in Hebrew: Leah means “Cow” and Rachel means “Ewe”! In order to achieve its aim the story puts these mothers in competition against each other, each striving through whatever means to be the best producer. But, as one commentator of the story has put it, ambition is “primarily a patriarchal prerogative”. Telling the story through this lens of ambitious competition may well distort the relationship between the women. Jewish author Anita Diamant has written a very interesting novel based on this story called *The Red Tent* (Picador, 1997). It tells the story from a very different perspective, presenting Leah, Rachel and their handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah as a community of women who supported each other in the midst of the patriarchal environment in which they lived. In the story told from this perspective life is not about winning against rival wives and concubines. Life is about living, learning, growing, sharing, celebrating, mourning, learning to know and accept oneself in spite of one’s limitations. Of course the pain of Rachel’s infertility may well have been there – something a woman can well imagine. And at a time where childbearing was a woman’s reason for existence, barrenness may well have been as good as death. But pain shared in a community of women is a different story to the painful conflict of competition. Interestingly enough, the high point for the women in this imaginative version of the story is the birth of Dinah, a daughter who will be able to carry on the women’s traditions and practices for the next generation! In fact, this is the only biblical story of the birth of a girl child – in the case of all the heroines of the Bible they appear only at marriageable age, and most often disappear once the sons they have borne are on their own. Their almost sole purpose as a foil to the men in their lives precludes the possibility of character development and transformation such as

we'd see, for example, in the person of Jacob. Motherhood is the most exalted female role in the biblical stories, but the lack of depth and complexity shown of them as characters mean that none can really function as a fully-fledged *human* role model. We *need* imagination to flesh out a full story for women like Rachel and Leah, and even more so, the servant women Bilhah and Zilpah who are completely ignored by the ongoing tradition.

Our world still thrives on competition and values winners, which naturally means some will always be defined against others. The ones admired are the ones who are more beautiful, richer, faster, stronger and so on. We might not use the language of God being on their side, but we do think people deserve to succeed if they work hard and have a competitive attitude (don't they say now that top athletes give as much attention to psychological training as physical: to be highly motivated might give the edge that puts you milliseconds ahead of your opponents).

A Community based on love rather than competition

Followers of Jesus, however, are part of a community that has a different culture to the world. Jesus left his

disciples with a *new* commandment, not one that the world knows. Radical discipleship is marked by the ethos of love. Not romantic love or natural family love that ties mother and children together. The love Jesus speaks of is between members of a community, embodied in people and seen in action. Jesus asked his followers to love each other with his quality of love. He is the model: "Love one another *as I have loved you*" (John 13:34-45).

This type of love is respectful of others, recognising the God-given unique and precious nature of the other person. The love that Jesus modelled for us includes proactive forgiveness: forgiveness which takes the initiative and reaches out to those who have offended. And it was love that went beyond its comfort zone, ultimately to the self-sacrifice of the cross. But throughout his ministry, Jesus would put the needs of others first. Followers of Jesus must resist the language of competition and instead live the language of love. The story of Jesus gives us a model to follow, and other stories, such as the early Christian community who gave their time, talents and property for the common good of all, provide challenges and encouragement along the way. But even these stories may need to be studied with different lenses.

Women in Church Leadership: A Reply

Andreana Reale

My friend Tom asked an important question about the role of women in church leadership. He says that he's heard a lot of arguments against female 'eldership' in the church, and wants to hear some arguments for. This is my response.

Tom - thanks for your willingness to grapple with this issue with such authenticity and openness. Given I am exploring a path of church ministry and leadership, I think I owe it to myself and my questioner to respond.

The key offending passage is this:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1 Timothy 2.11-15).

I can see, Tom, why you might find it difficult to biblically justify women in church leadership and, it would seem from the text, in positions where women would be teaching men. There is nothing ambiguous about 1 Timothy 2.11-15. It's not my favourite text, or the most quoted text within the modern church, but it is part of our sacred canon, and so must be contended with.

Part of grappling with biblical texts involves putting them alongside other passages. For a fuller picture of the role of women in the early church, we should look to the book of Acts and to the greetings in a number of Paul's letters, which describe and list a number of women. Not least of these is Priscilla who, along with her husband Aquila, runs a home church. The very early church was based in people's homes, which, being the locale of family, was the domain of women. The early churches were fairly egalitarian in structure – modelling themselves on a flat-structured family, as opposed to the vertical-structured and male-dominated temple or synagogue. The inclusive and egalitarian nature of the church is expressed nicely in Galatians 3.28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, *male or female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus".

But then, we hit 1 Timothy, which is very clear about the place of women. I actually think that what we have here is two different strands of thought.

Galatians is from the more egalitarian early church. 1 Timothy, though attributed to Paul, is probably from the early second century. The language used is quite different, and indicates a later period. It was apparently quite common for followers of important people in the ancient world to write new texts and attribute them to their hero, which appears to be the case for 1 Timothy. Hence it was included in the canon, because Pauline origin was one basis of canonical inclusion. But that is not to dismiss 1 Timothy – though it may not be Paul's, it was still canonized, and as Christians we are therefore obliged to read it and take it seriously.

Unfortunately, the natural progression of things tends to be away from egalitarian origins, towards concentration of power amongst the powerful. What we see, between the time of Galatians and the time of 1 Timothy, is a movement towards patriarchy.

As such, I cannot read 1 Timothy 2.11-15 as divine revelation. Rather, I read it as divine WARNING – of what happens to radical equality in the midst of power and male dominance.

I have picked. I have chosen. I have decided which tradition I prefer. I do this on the basis of my life experience: of the women leaders who I have seen enrich the church (and what a waste had they been silent!), of the amazing nun who teaches my Gospel of John class (which has men in it), and my church history lecturer who also happens to be the first ordained woman in the Baptist church in Australia.

But I think that is what we are all forced to do. Others privilege 1 Timothy, and they do so on the basis of their life experience, also. For some, silencing women is more appealing than radical equality.

I actually think that it's amazing that we have hints of a tradition that values female equality in the church within our canon. After all it was the church – the church controlled mainly by men – who chose which texts should become scripture and which should not. But all we have is hints, while the texts that purport to silence women are enshrined loud and clear.

So that's my two cents, or maybe a dollar. Dave is calling me for dinner so I must go. Thanks for the question Tom, and may God be with you as you grapple with it further.

My Story

Bessie Pereira



There I was, in the pulpit in my grey deaconess uniform – and wearing a blue veil! This was in the early sixties and I was a new student training for ordination in the Anglican Church, and head covering was the required dress for deaconesses in those days. After that service the Vicar told me I looked like the Blessed Virgin Mary and even some in the congregation commented on my appearance being like to that of a nun. How embarrassing was that! And so from then on I refused to wear the veil. That was probably my first ‘gender fight’. In writing about ‘women in ministry’ rather than deal with theological or biblical issues, I feel to write about my own journey which spanned a time of great change.

Having dealt with the ‘veil’ decisively, the more difficult issue for me was the fact that although male ordinands were fully supported by the Diocese, female ordinands were not and I had to work part time to pay my way through Ridley College training. The strange thing was that I considered this to be normal and never challenged it, even in my own mind. While the men only had ‘Sunday duties’, I was assigned a parish

appointment which required me to be on deck two afternoons, an evening and a Sunday with regular preaching, youth and Sunday School work, visiting (on a push bike called ‘Ruby’) and be involved with all the rest of the rough and tumble of parish life – and still do full time studies at Ridley! On top of that, I earned personal pocket money by house cleaning on a Friday afternoon and as a ward assistant at Fairfield Hospital during holidays. I considered myself blessed to be given assistance via bursaries for books and uniform. Ah! The old days! I look back and wonder how I did it all.

My second parish was very different to the first. I was not permitted to take any part in a Sunday service. My role was strictly with women and children plus a mixed youth group of which the curate and I shared leadership. Again, I accepted this, but was frustrated after the wider role I had in my first parish experience. This being recognised as the toughest area in Melbourne at the time, I was kept busy. It had been the area chosen for the relocation of slums from inner Melbourne in time for the Olympics in 1956.



Somewhat better houses, but the problems remained the same. A lot of family breakdown, poverty and depression. As well as the usual parish duties, much of my work would have been better served by a social worker, but the church was all there was at the time. I became a probation officer to women and girls also. I think the seeds of Anabaptism were sown in me in those years.

It was in the late sixties and after ordination as Deaconess that my experience of parish life broadened out with a move to the other side of Melbourne. I had more of a teaching role and even had a men's group at one stage. A woman teaching men? However, I still had no prospects of ever being in an independent role in parish ministry, but would always be working under the exclusive authority of the (male of course) Vicar. This I must say to my present amazement, I considered normal at the time! Everything to do with gender roles in the ministry in the Anglican Church seemed set in concrete. And so I just got on with the job but used every opportunity to push the boundaries in order to be involved on every level of ministry to the extent that I was permitted.

The eighties saw radical change through the efforts of such groups as the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW). Most of this happened around me rather than my being directly involved on the battle front. I got on with what I was doing on ground level in the parish but was regularly called to meetings held by MOW or Archbishop Penman. When it became 'church law' that women were to be included in the

three fold ministry of the Anglican Church, I was sent a letter (which of course I still have in my possession) by the Archbishop, inviting me to a service for the making of deacons. In my letter of acceptance I couldn't help but comment to the Archbishop that my having been a deaconess for nearly two decades and now being allowed to become a 'deacon' seemed something more akin to a sex change than changing anything as to what I do or my place in the hierarchy of the church. He saw my point! I realised of course that this was just a stepping stone towards full priesthood which would change the role of women eventually.

The first ordination of women at St Paul's Cathedral was one of great excitement and made the news on TV and the press. However, when we were all ready to move into the Cathedral, we were all bundled out due to a bomb scare! The police went through the Cathedral with sniffer dogs before we were allowed to proceed. Feelings ran high over the issue of allowing women to take full part in the three-fold ministry of the church. To this day, there are dioceses and parishes that refuse to allow women to minister.

My experience in my last parish in the late eighties was a period of turmoil around me and within. On the one hand I was made Associate Minister of the parish, but many clergy and lay people were not ready to deal with the leap into gender equality in the church and I was often caught betwixt and between! Remember of course, that this was a period in my life when I should have been at the peak of my calling

(career). Just a couple of scenarios might explain my situation.

We had a change of vicar and in the interregnum between vicars, a locum priest had the task of preparing the parish for change and then to prepare the service of induction of the new priest. I was omitted from having any part in the service or to even sit with the clergy attending – even those from other churches in the district (and, incidentally, I was the President of the local Ministers' Association). I remonstrated with the locum about this and reminded him that perhaps as Associate Minister I might need to be included in some way. He saw my point and actually he later became very significant in my future ministry in many positive ways and is still a dear friend. We laugh about that situation.

It was the first parish for the new vicar and because it seemed rather ironic after all my years of experience in parish ministry that I work 'under' the new vicar's authority, the Bishop encouraged my role as a more independent one in the second centre of the parish. After having been left on their own to make do with occasional involvement by the Vicar or myself and lay preachers, a small number of parishioners did not want me in charge of their church. They made life very difficult for me.

During this time over the 'women issue' in the church, I began to question the ordination of anybody. I felt that my biggest difficulty was not being a woman in the church, but rather with the hierarchical system that not only placed women in a subordinate position, but also 'lay' people. I began to see the clergy/lay divide as being unbiblical and in fact damaging to the church. Over the years I had seen many damaging political situations occur in the church that had to do with the way we 'do church'. My reading of early church history and devouring Robert Banks' books which the locum priest had lent me before he moved on from the parish with the arrival of the new vicar, convinced me that church had to be different.

So having been, in a sense, 'primed' to be the first woman vicar in the Melbourne Diocese, I stepped out of the church altogether. In 1989 I poured my heart out to the Bishop and was released from my licence in the Diocese on the basis that I could return any time in the future if I so wished. Since then, I have been involved in home churches and the OIKOS Australia ministry has grown keeping pace with the growth of the new ways of being church. I spoke recently with a Bishop who had been my 'boss' in my second parish all that time ago, and told him that I feel that I am now at the peak of my ministry and that Australia is

my parish! Incidentally, all my contemporaries in the ministry of the church are retired or dead.

Of course, the house church movement isn't devoid of the 'gender problem'. I was challenged recently at a seminar where I was one of the keynote speakers, as to why, when the Bible says that women shouldn't teach men, was I doing just that? Sometimes I receive calls for help from home churches when women's leadership is questioned. I point them in the direction of biblical passages to do with Pricilla and Aquila, described by Paul as 'co-workers' and that Priscilla is often mentioned first (e.g. Romans 16:3). They were house church leaders. Junia and Andronicus, wife/husband or sister/brother were greeted by Paul as 'outstanding among the apostles' (Romans 16:7). Junia was unlikely to be the only woman apostle. Some women were prophetesses, surely a more 'dangerous' gift than teaching (Acts 21:9)! Others were described as 'women who worked hard for the Lord' (Romans 16:12), co-strugglers (Phil 4:2-3). And so one could go on. I think the most compelling argument is that Jesus never put any restrictions on the ministry of women. His life and ministry were surrounded by them. I often point house churches to such books as *What's With Paul and Women?* by Jon Zens (Ecclesia Press) and *A Woman's Place. House Churches in Earliest Christianity* by Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald (Fortress Press), among others.

It is important to see women's and men's roles alongside one another. It just simply doesn't make sense that God would give gifts liberally to women and then for them to be chained to a pew with head covering and gagged! I have lived through the transition period and we are still seeing the dregs of difficulty for women to be released in the church, but it has to come. God is moving in amazing ways in releasing His church missionally across the globe and the 'women issue' will be swallowed up in the thrust outwards as we see the church moving out of the building to be amongst the marginalised and hurting in the way Jesus was. As we become Kingdom rather than 'church' focused and get back to what Jesus really said and did, we will see women and men together take on the tasks ahead seamlessly.

I look back with deep gratitude to God for all the training and experience I gained over the decades I worked in the Anglican Church. In God's economy, every bit counts – the good and the difficult – and all this has given me the skills needed for the task I now have in hand. I see a different experience in the church for the women coming forward for ordination today, but I am aware that they, too, have some of the same struggles I had all that time ago. I could never go back. I have been released.

Faith Challenged and Asserted

Sandra Lowther-Owens



Any day of the week, especially if you look beyond our local newspaper you can be exposed to unimaginable sadness, poverty, brutality and injustice. Non-Christians ask how can a God allow such stuff to happen? In Psalm 10 the psalmist looks around him and sees injustice, he sees poverty and hopelessness and he cries out, “Why Lord do you stand far off?”

Sometimes in our own hearts when we look out at the world, when we hear people’s stories we too can be left in the same place. We can feel like Job did:

“The groans of the dying rise from the city,
and the souls of the wounded cry out for help.
But God charges no one with wrongdoing.” (Job 24:12)

Job feels justified in laying his complaints before God. He wants answers. He has seen the world and he demands to know why God allows it all to happen.

God answers Job but not in the way Job intended. In effect God says, “Don’t doubt me, don’t doubt my character, my power or my justice. Trust me that I have it all in hand.”

Job returns to a point of faith. His beliefs were challenged, they were shaken but in the face of God he is able to assert

“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours
can be thwarted” (42:2)

The Psalmist too comes to a point of faith. Having looked at the suffering, at the injustice, at the arrogance of the perpetrators he returns to his hope, his sure hope.

But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless.

You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike
terror.

The psalmist’s questions and concerns are calmed as he once again remembers and proclaims what he knows of God. God is powerful, God is merciful, God is compassionate. The psalmist, thrown into agonized doubt because of what he sees and maybe even is experiencing, is able to return to trust. His faith is challenged, tried, and proven true.

There are at least four ways we can respond to the suffering of our world.

The first and possibly the most dangerous is indifference. This is the furthestest position from love. It is the risk of so much exposure through the media, we can develop a blindness to what is happening, an unwillingness to allow it to impinge on our comfortable lives.

The second is a paralysis. It is all so overwhelming and so big that we are unable to fathom where to start or even how we alone can make a difference. We can end up feeling that there is nothing or little we can actually do to change it and so we turn our backs. We return to what we feel we do control.

The third is to rush out and do anything, and do everything. When we do this, we can become disconnected to God. In our busyness we can lose sight that our actions are to spring out of our relationship with God. If we lose our relationship, we disconnect ourselves from the one

who wants to be working in us and changing us to be like him.

Often people ask if it matters whether we're involved with Christians or non-Christians, as long as we are all working to make the world better. My reflection on this is that many individuals - Christian, atheist, Buddhist, and Muslim - all have the desire to bring comfort to those that suffer. Whenever anyone works for good they reveal God's workmanship. However, God calls for us not simply to do good, but to do it in the context of extending his kingdom. When we pray we allow God to not only empower us, but we are given the opportunity to become part of what he is doing and that means the impact will not be simply physical but also spiritual.

The Bible makes it clear that indifference, apathy and even being paralysed can have eternal effects. The prophet Amos warns Israel that God is watching and urges them to live out their faith. Seek good, he urges, not evil that you might live. Hate evil, love good, maintain justice in the courts. Then, he assures the Israelites, the Lord will be with you just as you say he is.

Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, makes this warning even more pointedly. Jesus will return and we will be held accountable for how we lived our lives. We show our belief by our actions; it is not enough to simply claim the title of Christian and then live lives that do not reflect it.

In the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus comes and divides the world into two groups, and to one group he says, (as paraphrased in Australian colloquial speak):

'Welcome, you who have been given the thumbs up by my Father. Ever since the foundation of the world, there has been a kingdom ready with your name on it. Come now, and inherit it; because
I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I came seeking refuge and you made me welcome,
I didn't have a stitch to wear and you gave me clothes,
I was diseased and you took care of me,
I was in detention and you visited me.'

Then those who have lived right will ask him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When were you a refugee and we welcomed you, or in detention and we visited you? When did we find you without clothes or sick and do something about it?'

And the King will reply, 'The fact is, you did these things to other people who were regarded as the dregs of society, but who I love as my own family; and each time you helped one of them, you were helping me.'

One commentator points out that their compassionate actions were so much part of them they weren't even memorable, it is just how they lived. By living in such a way they showed who their father was, in whose images they were made in, they clearly reflected God.

To those who live with indifference, or apathy, or who allow themselves to become permanently paralysed Jesus says

'You lot have been written off. Get out of my sight! An incinerator that will burn forever has been prepared for the devil and his agents. You are going into it with them; because

I was hungry and you didn't give me a bite,
I was thirsty and you gave me nothing,
I came seeking refuge and you wouldn't let me in,
I didn't have a stitch to wear and you left me to freeze,

I was diseased and in detention and you wouldn't come near me.'

God has strong feelings on the subject of how we live. He freely saves us by grace, and while he doesn't demand perfection, he does ask of us that we let him recreate us in his image. We cannot claim to be his if we refuse to reflect his character, his mercy and his compassion.

That so many question the nature of God and even his existence is in part because so many have used the label of Christian without revealing the true nature of God. Part of the low esteem that God is held in is our responsibility for being such poor conduits.

Returning to possible responses to the suffering in the world, the fourth response is the one I believe God wants of us - to see the world as it really is, to understand who God is, and to do what God calls us to do.

This won't happen without prayer. In prayer God is magnified. We remember who he is. We have our doubts answered. We are changed, by connecting with God - he rubs off on us.

Then, being re-established in our faith, like the Psalmist we can look at the world, see it as it is, and knowing we are part of a something bigger, we can live lives that allow God's love, mercy and compassion to overflow.

When we allow apathy and indifference to dictate our actions we deny God's compassion and mercy.

When we allow ourselves to be paralysed by how overwhelming it all is we deny God's power and control.

When we rush off to do stuff we deny God's plans for us and the world.

The world and all the suffering and grief in it will challenge our faith. It will challenge our belief in God's goodness and love, it will challenge our belief in God's power and it will challenge our belief that God had a plan for our world, that he is involved with us and our world.

When our faith is challenged as the Psalmist's was, we need to re-group. To refocus on the God we serve, on his nature and his promises. When we do, we too will find ourselves able to stand and proclaim with the Psalmist

The LORD is King for ever and ever;
the nations will perish from his land.
You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,

so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

Once asserted, our faith will change our lives. Our attitudes, our actions, our life reveal what we believe. If we believe in an all powerful, compassionate and merciful God who acts in our world to bring about his purposes and uses us then we will live like that.

The writer of Hebrews makes this clear connection:

Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Doing what the Lord requires of us may cost us more than comfort, it may lead us to evaluate our lives and make some seriously counter-cultural decisions.

Over the last few years to improve my health I have been doing Pilates. At the start, doing even the simplest things felt incredibly hard. I couldn't even breathe properly. My body held on to the old bad patterns - they even felt normal. My head felt straight until I looked in the mirror. I had to learn new patterns, new ways of using my muscles. I needed help, to constantly re-check, re-evaluate. Gradually my muscles began to work the way intended.

Learning to live God's way, will require that same dedication. Like my neck and breathing looked fine until looked at in the mirror our lives will need to be examined in the light of the gospel to make sure it reflects God. We may need to give up our old ways. We will need to constantly check that we are not falling into old patterns. Gradually as we gain new ways of seeing the world, of making the right choices, God's choices, we will gain freedom, strength and peace.

I am going to finish with the story of David Bussau.

He grew up in orphanages in New Zealand after being deserted by his parents. But at fifteen he bought into his first business, a hotdog stand outside a football stadium. Eventually, he and his family moved to Australia where he became a millionaire in the construction industry. At thirty-five he had an epiphany - helped by James Packer, of all people - that made him realise that there must be more to life than accumulating wealth.

He moved his family to Bali to help a village rebuild after an earthquake. Once the initial work was done he looked around and realised that while he had helped the poor, he hadn't done anything to change their long term future. Once he left they would still remain poor.

He is a committed Christian. And I believe at this point his faith, his gift of being an entrepreneur and his awareness of the poverty around him combined to create one of the big ideas the world needs.

He realised that what held so many back was the inability to receive credit at a realistic rate. In the village he was in, the interest rate was 600%. For much of the world, debt cripples and maintains people in poverty. A child can be born carrying the debt of many generations.

David's idea to change this become known as microfinance. Microfinance is about basic financial services - small loans, savings accounts, fund transfers and insurance. Alongside non-financial services such as business training, microfinance assists people living in poverty who wouldn't usually qualify for regular banking services because they have no form of collateral or formal identification.

Loans as small as \$100 help people in poverty start or grow their own small business. This enables them to earn an income so they can afford food, clean water, proper shelter and an education for their children.

By helping a mother buy a sewing machine to start a tailoring business or a father buy seeds to plant a vegetable garden, small loans enable people to earn an income and provide for their families. As each business grows, loans are paid back and lent out again. With 97% of loans repaid, the cycle continues, year after year. Each successful business feeds a family, employs more people and eventually helps empower a whole community.

David Bussau's idea has helped change the world, with organisations all over the world now using it to transform the lives of impoverished people. It is estimated that microfinance now creates a new job every thirty seconds.

He says, "I'm certain that if more people were just prepared to take a risk and release the gifts and talents that they have got then we could collectively change the world in a massive way".

As we work for God's kingdom we begin to live in it.

The more we practise it, and work to see it happen, the more it will simply become part of who we are until we stand before God and when he commends us for feeding the hungry, for taking care of the sick, for fighting for justice, we can't even remember doing it. It has become unremarkable because it is who we are and how we live.

However, for most of us, that point is still far off - in the here and now we need to pledge ourselves to becoming what God wants us to be - the hands, feet, and hearts through which he shows a hurting world how much he loves them. We are to become living parables for God's plans for the world. As we are called to pray God's kingdom into existence, we are called to be living examples of God's kingdom breaking through into a world that so sorely needs to see and know him.

Mourning Esther's Sisters on Patpong Road

Jen Noonan



Jen is in the back row, third from right

'The Bible was written by men about men for men'. So began the 2011 'Women Doing Theology' workshop of the World Student Christian Federation (Asia Pacific) with the theme of '*A critical feminist reading of the bible for women's liberation and transformation.*' Women representatives from a number of Asian countries (plus me from Australia) gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, to give voice to the many unnamed women of the Bible. This article is an awkward attempt to make sense of an unsettling experience that brought the experience of biblical women into the stark relief of modern day reality.

In applying a hermeneutics of lamentation to the story of Esther we imagined the untold stories of the virgins who filled the harem of King Xerxes. These young women had been rounded up from throughout the empire in an attempt to locate a suitable replacement for Queen Vashti who had had the audacity to stand up to the king's lecherous request for her to parade in front of his drinking buddies at his lavish banquet, and who had consequently been banished from his presence. They

were teenagers with no choice in the matter, though we can imagine that their parents may have tried to hide them. Once in the harem they were held for twelve months, given beauty treatments in order to have their opportunity to impress the king in a one night stand; the king rated each virgin and decided her fate. And what of life in the harem? One can only imagine the fear and uncertainty, the longing for home and family, the competitiveness and hurtful gossip, the rejection and degradation. This is royally sanctioned human trafficking.

An important element of the program was an 'exposure' outing to assist participants to understand issues affecting the people of the host country. Before the trip, I had in mind that a local person would show us sites in the red light district and we would 'observe' them in the sanitised manner of western tourism. A few hours before we were due to go I learnt that the exposure would involve attending a show in the famous red light district of Patpong Road. Not just the bikini-clad women dancing on tables that I had seen the previous

night whilst wandering through the night markets, but a 'pussy show', a well-known (to everyone except me it seems) Bangkok institution that involves watching women manipulate objects with their vaginas. I was immediately sickened and disgusted at this notion and resolved that I would not attend as I did not want to be yet another western tourist objectifying the women. However I was in two minds after our Thai guide Jane (a lawyer who has advocated for trafficked women and guided people into these shows for the past fifteen years) suggested that it might be possible to buy the women a drink and have a conversation with them, and after one of the lecturers suggested that this would be a life transforming activity. With great trepidation I decided to go.

And so we set out for the red light district, passing through streets that would not have been out of place in Tokyo featuring vertically hanging neon advertising signs on every shopfront. Jane informed us that this particular area has evolved to cater for Korean and Japanese men who prefer pale skinned women. Outside every building were loitering women, a number of them clearly transgender, wearing miniskirts and high heels. We were cautioned that every establishment here was a front for offering sex; karaoke bars and restaurants were not what they seemed. Patpong Road was originally a banana plantation; the land had been owned by the Patpong family and was put to use as a rest and recreation area for American soldiers during the Vietnam War.

We then came to the other streets and lanes that make up the area, with more women and transgender people hanging around the outside of buildings and bars, milling with the hundreds of people starting out on their night of fun in the pleasant tropical evening. Here again were the night markets bordering onto clubs blaring loud music, where just inside the doorway one could see women dancing on tabletops in bikinis. This wasn't dancing in the true sense though; it was not carefree and enjoyable in the way of normal dancing but a work routine that lacked any spontaneity or enjoyment. We walked through the markets and were approached by hawkers showing their 'pussy menus' in our faces. I was confused: why were they spruiking to a group of women who clearly wouldn't be interested in having sex? Eventually Jane struck a deal with a woman who led us up a dark carpeted stairway which had no exterior markings.

The staircase led to a smallish room which had a round stage in the centre with seating around the edge of the walls. It was smoky and 'duf-duf' music was thumping. We were shown to some seats and immediately pressed to choose a drink, which was part of the entry fee. It was palpably uncomfortable to be sipping a Coke as though this was any kind of normal entertainment. As our eyes adjusted to the scene before us I felt a visceral lurching in my stomach as I realised that sitting across from us was a middle-aged white woman out with some friends, gregariously laughing and enjoying the show as she sipped a beer. Near them were a few young white couples. I had expected to see sad men hanging around for sex, which was also the case, but not tourists behaving as those this was a stripper at a hens' night.

On stage were two women wearing black bikinis doing pole 'dancing' whilst three other women wearing white bikinis took turns to remove their bikini bottoms and perform tricks using their vaginas. At one stage the woman offered us a bat that was to be used to try to hit the ping-pong balls she was about to propel in our direction. We declined and shifted our gaze. However, the happy tourists threw themselves into the challenge with much mirth, even knocking some of the balls back. As the emperor looked on from his portrait on the wall we endured about half an hour of this macabre freak show before stumbling back out onto the street and into the stalls selling cheap t-shirts and knick knacks. It occurred to me then that this was all about consumption: people come to Bangkok to exploit bodies – female bodies – for sexual gratification, for cheap labour. How much did we pay to see these women demean their bodies? Just 150 baht, the equivalent of \$5, which included a drink, and which was three times the price we had been quoted for other similar establishments on the street. What price dignity? Jane had attempted to talk to one of the women when she came asking for tips, but the woman would not be drawn into conversation and so the voices of the women remained unknown to us. I fought back tears as we returned to the hostel and had a restless sleep that night, shocked at what I had seen. Should I have gone on the exposure trip? Part of me still agrees with my gut instinct to stay away; another part of me recognises that nothing else could ever have revealed to me the depth of shame and disgust I felt at seeing white tourists delighting in such degrading acts.

When we looked into the faces of the women at the club we saw tired, bored women who had contempt for those who had come to see them. They had likely been forced into this 'work', probably trafficked from a nearby country. We mourned the loss of freedom and innocence of these women of Patpong Road just as we mourned for Esther's sisters who were used and then discarded by the powerful people of their day. We attempted for a short while to enter into the experience of these women and share their sorrow, to imagine what life might be like for those who, because of their beauty and their poverty, are vulnerable within the patriarchy which controls them. The goal of the workshop was to go beyond merely reading the text to consider how women can be liberated and transformed by the bible. As we lament and pray with our Thai sisters, we in the west can consider how our choices about consumption impact poor Asian women and how our objectification of women's bodies has spawned an industry that reduces women to their bodily functions and holds men captive to their basest instincts. We can recall that Jesus broke the social taboos of his day by forming relationships with women and giving them active roles in the Jesus movement. We can restore women to their equal place in the Kingdom of Heaven, resisting the assumptions and pervasiveness of patriarchy, and giving priority to the most vulnerable of voiceless women, including Esther's sisters and the women of Patpong Road.

Two World-Views In Tension

Dave Andrews



Two Philosophies – Security Versus Community

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says to understand the origins of the tensions that we are facing today, we need to go back to Genesis. He says:

In its initial verses ... the Bible sets out two propositions that will frame its entire vision of mankind. The first affirms the sanctity of the human individual as individual. Every person is in 'the image of God'. The second asserts the incompleteness of the individual as individual. 'It is not good for man (sic) to be alone.' Hence the human need for relationship, association, and for stable structures within which these can grow and be sustained ...

The Rabbi then goes on to ask and answer a key question. 'How do we move from unbearable isolation to some form of tolerable association? By way of answer, I want to tell two stories both implicit in the Bible, but quite different in their implications ...'

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The first story the Rabbi tells is the *political story* most famously told by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes starts with the 'state of nature', which the Rabbi says is very close to the biblical description of the state of things between the Fall and the Flood - 'unmediated conflict'. In this state of 'unmediated conflict', Hobbes says, people are 'in that condition which is called "War"; and such a war as is of every man, against every man (sic)'. The outcome, Hobbes

says, is that life is inevitably 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.

The Rabbi asks 'How then do human beings create societies which can ensure a degree of security and safety?' The Rabbi says that Hobbes' answer to this question is that, in order protect ourselves from the pre-emptive attacks of others, we 'hand over some of our powers as individuals to a supreme authority which will make laws and enforce them'. This, the Rabbi says, is the origin of the 'social contract', which 'brings into being the "great Leviathan" of the state, and thus is born *political society*...needed to bring about a order'.

According to the *political story*, associations are created to 'contain conflict by the use of external power, by legislation or taxation backed up, in extremis, by the threat of coercive force – an army or police force'. For Hobbes, the use of force is the foundation of society.

The second story the Rabbi tells is a *social story* which he says 'begins at the same starting-point, but using different concepts and evoking a distinct set of themes. The simplest way of proceeding is to ask what actually happens in the Hebrew Bible after the words: 'It is not good for man to be alone'? God creates woman. Man then responds with the first poem in the Bible:

This is now bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called woman [*ishah*] because she
was taken from man [*ish*]. (Gen 2:23)

The Rabbi insists on using two Hebrew words, because, ‘the Hebrew text contains a nuance often missed in translation. Until this point man has been called *adam*, man-as-part-of-nature (the word *adam* signifies ‘that which is taken from the earth’). Now for the first time man is called – indeed calls himself – *ish*, which means man-as-person. Significantly, he does this only after he has named woman. The Bible is suggesting, with great subtlety, that the human person must first pronounce the name of the other before he can know his own name. He or she must say “Thou” before he can say “I”. Relationship precedes identity.’

According to the Rabbi, in this spiritual story ‘the primary social bond is not the state, but marriage’ (‘Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh’, Genesis 2:24). What kind of bond is this? Clearly, given the way the Hebrew Bible describes it, it is not a Hobbesian contract between two independent individuals, each seeking their own interests. It is instead – in a key word of Jewish thought – a covenant (*brit* in Hebrew), and this is neither an alliance of interests nor, strictly speaking, an emotional state. Instead it is a bond of identity, as if to say: ‘This is part of who I am’.

This central concept is taken up in various ways in the Hebrew Bible. There is a covenant handed on by parents and children (the subject of much of Genesis) and another and more structured covenant at Mount Sinai, with the Israelites as a people. This affects the way the Bible understands certain obligations. Consider welfare. The book of Leviticus defines the duties of citizens to one another with such phrases as ‘If your brother becomes poor’. On this view, I owe help to others not because it is in my long term interest to do so, nor because a government has so decreed, but because the other is part of my extended family, and thus in a certain sense part of who I am. The members of a society are linked by a bond of kinship and fraternity.

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What is the difference between the *political* and the *social* stories the Rabbi tells?

The first distinctive the Rabbi points out is that in the *political* story the central figure is ‘I’, whereas in the *social* story the central figure is ‘We’. In the *political* story, my association with others is not essential, but a necessary evil I need to construct in order to ensure my survival. In the *social* story, our affiliation with one another is essential, and is inherently good. ‘The “We” of which “I” am a part – marriage, the family, the nation (is) understood as an extended family, and

ultimately humanity itself, considered as a single family under the parenthood of God himself.’

The second distinctive the Rabbi points out is that in the *political* story the driving force behind my actions is self interest, whereas in the *social* story the driving force behind our interactions is identification with others. Our ‘responsibilities flow from belonging’ – ‘the kind of relationship that exists between husbands and wives, or parents and children.’ The Bible refers to this kind of relationship as “*hesed*”, which is usually translated “compassion”.

The third distinctive the Rabbi points out is that in the *political* story the dominant form of association is a contract, whereas in the *social* story the dominant form of affiliation is a covenant (*brit*). People who make contracts are bound to fulfil the letter of the law on which they are based. People who make covenants are bound to go beyond the letter of the law to fulfil the love for one another on which they are based. ‘Parties can disengage from a contract when it is no longer to their mutual benefit to continue. A covenant binds them even – perhaps especially – in difficult times. This is because a covenant is not predicated on interest, but instead on loyalty, fidelity, holding together even when things seem to be driving you apart.’ The Rabbi says that a covenant has a ‘moral component that renders them more binding and open-ended than could be accounted for in terms of interest.’ So much so that the Hebrew word “*hesed*”, which is usually translated “compassion”, might be more accurately translated as ‘covenantal obligation’. Daniel Elazar says that the idea of covenant ‘expresses the idea that people can freely create communities and polities, peoples and publics, and civil society itself through such morally grounded and sustained compacts (whether religious or otherwise in impetus), establishing thereby enduring partnerships’.

The fourth distinctive the Rabbi points out is that in the *political* story the contract is maintained by the threat and the use of force, whereas in the *social* story the covenant is maintained by faithfulness (*emunah*).

A contract is maintained by an external force, the monopoly within the state of the justified use of coercive power. A covenant, by contrast, is maintained by an internalised sense of identity, loyalty, obligation, responsibility and reciprocity.’ “*Emunah*” is at the heart of the Jewish religion. It is often wrongly translated as ‘faith’. However, *emunah* is not an ‘intellectual attribute’ but a ‘moral one’. It does not mean ‘faith’. It means ‘faithfulness’ ‘It signifies the willingness to enter into and to stand by a long-term, open-ended commitment. It is what is needed to sustain a covenant.

So, the Rabbi says:

there are two stories about human associations, one told in our political classics, the other in our great religious texts. A contract (advocated in our political classics) gives rise to the instrumentalities of the state – governments, nations, parties, the use of centralised power and the mediated resolution of conflict. It is the basis of political society. A covenant (advocated in our great religious texts) gives rise to quite different institutions – families, communities, peoples, traditions, and voluntary associations. It is the basis of civil society.

Two Psychologies – Fear Versus Love

Albert Einstein, the famous scientist, stated that ‘one of the most important questions facing every individual is whether or not the universe is friendly’. It would appear that ‘most people do not believe that it is.’ ‘Fear is something we all experience’. ‘No single instant is truly fearless - even the most loving or playful setting seems to hold some unseen promise of danger.’ ‘As human beings we naturally fear hunger, illness and injury. We also fear economic hardship, social disrepute, and abandonment. And we are afraid of the time when death will come to us or to our loved ones.’

Wayne Muller, a psychotherapist, says ‘Terrifying fears we inherit from our childhood refuse to fade away. The lies, the betrayal, the abuse, the desertion – we remember each moment in vivid detail. For the child who has been hurt, fear becomes a reflexive response.’ ‘Our childhood fears (are) compounded because the people who claimed to be the guardians of our safety were inevitably the same people who caused us hurt. So just as we learned to be afraid, we also came to believe that no one could be trusted to give us shelter.’

Ghassan Hage, an Australian anthropologist, says that, as Australians, we are also afraid that if we took the land we live in, others may want to take it too. He says that Australians have an underlying fear of revenge for the genocide our ancestors committed, de-colonisation by aborigines, and re-colonisation by migrants and refugees. ‘We live our lives in fear, regardless of whether those fears are real or (not)’.

Parker Palmer, a Quaker educator, says, ‘Fear is the air we breathe. We subscribe to religions that exploit our dread of death. We do business in an economy of fear driven by consumer worries about keeping up with the neighbours. And we practice a politics of fear

in which candidates are elected by playing on voter’s anxieties about race and class.’ And we continue to ‘collaborate with these structures because they promise to protect us against one of the deepest fears at the heart of being human – the fear of having a live encounter with alien “otherness”.’

Palmer says our fear of ‘having a live encounter with alien “otherness”’ is based on:

1. a fear of difference – of someone or something “other” than ourselves challenging us;
2. a fear of conflict – a conflict that will surely ensue when the “other” challenges us;
3. a fear of loss – we fear the loss of something of ourselves in a win-lose conflict; and,
4. a fear of change – even if we accept the promise of unity in diversity, the prospect of conflict being instructive, and the possibility of “win-win” solutions and even “winning” through “losing”, we are still scared of the pain in the challenge to change our lives.

At this point, the anguished existentialist Albert Camus says, ‘We are seized by a vague fear, an instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits.’

Some fear is healthy. It may be a sign of openness, responsiveness, vulnerability, a willingness to take risks, and the possibility of scary, but significant change. But much fear is unhealthy. It alienates us from others and ourselves. David Benner, a professor of spirituality and psychology, says:

Fear works in such a way that the object of the fear is almost irrelevant. Fearful people are more alike than the differences between the foci of their fear might suggest... When fear arises, we harden our bodies and our hearts, closing inward to protect ourselves. Sometimes we feel paralysed, unable to move; at other times we race around faster, trying to make ourselves into a moving target, something harder to hit. We build walls, call up armies, and pay governments to protect us from danger as we try to minimise the risks of being human.

When we live in fear of everything that may bring us harm, we effectively insulate ourselves from life itself – because sorrow, illness, injury and death are unavoidable ingredients in life... *Fearful people live within restrictive boundaries.* They tend to be quite cautious and conservative. They also tend to be highly vigilant, ever guarding against moving out of the bounds within which they feel most comfortable.

People who live in fear feel compelled to remain in control. They attempt to control themselves and they attempt to control their world. Often,

despite their best intentions, this spills over into efforts to control others...

The fearful person may appear deeply loving, but fear always interferes with the impulse to love. Fear blocks responsiveness to others. Energy invested in maintaining safety and comfort always depletes energy available for others.

According to the sage Aussie cartoonist, Michael Leunig, we only have two options - love and fear. We can choose one or the other - but not both:

There are only two feelings.	Love and fear.
There are only two languages.	Love and fear.
There are only two activities.	Love and fear.
There are only two motives.	Love and fear.
There are only two results.	Love and fear.

If we allow fear to dominate our lives it destroys our capacity to love others. As the songwriter Amanda McBroom put it in her classic love song 'The Rose' :

It's the heart afraid of breaking
that never learns to dance.
It's the dream afraid of waking
That never takes a chance.
It's the one who won't be taken
Who cannot seem to give.
And the soul afraid of dying
That never learns to live.

Albert Camus says if we draw back because of our fear, we may miss out on our moment of enlightenment:

We are seized by a vague fear, an instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits. *At that moment we are feverish but also porous, so the slightest touch makes us quiver to the depths of our being. We come across a cascade of light and there is eternity.*

According to Alfred Lord Tennyson: 'He that shuts Love out, in turn shall be shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie, howling in the outer darkness'. The language the poet uses may be hyperbole, but social observers, like Ghassan Hage, would say that is exactly what Australia, as a nation, has done. We have chosen to reject 'caring' which always includes a concern for others as well as ourselves. And, consequently, all we are left with is, what he calls, 'worrying' - 'a narcissistic preoccupation with our own safety and security'.

Two Perspectives - Two Approaches

<i>Basic Idea</i>	Security	Community
<i>Basic Identity</i>	Self	Self With Others
<i>Basic Drive</i>	Self Interest	Involvement with Others
<i>Basic Stance</i>	Fear	Love
<i>Basic Association</i>	Contract	Covenant
<i>Basic Structure</i>	State	Society
<i>Basic Instrument</i>	Regulation	Conversation
<i>Basic Discourse</i>	Legality	Morality
<i>Basic Sanction</i>	Threat of Force	Peril of Infidelity
<i>Basic Culture</i>	Focused on: Safety and Security Risk Avoiding Apprehensive Controlling Restrictive Rigid	Focused on: Maturity and Responsibility Risk Taking Affirmative Nurturing Supportive Flexible

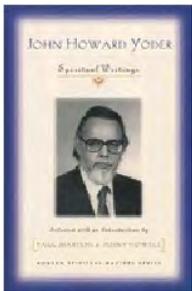
1. *What are the signs of the discourse of 'security' and 'fear' in our organization or congregation?*
2. *What are the signs of the discourse of 'community' and 'love' in our organization/congregation?*
3. *What are ways that we can engage in the discourse of 'security' and 'fear' without surrendering our wholehearted commitment to the discourse of 'community' and 'love'?*
4. *What would it mean specifically for our organization/congregation to comply with the demands of the discourse of 'security' and 'fear', yet resist the tendency of the 'security' and 'fear' to displace the fundamental underlying attitudes that are intrinsic to the discourse of 'community' and 'love'?*

Review

Spiritual Writings

John Howard Yoder; edited by Paul Martens, Jennifer L. Howell (Orbis Books, 2011)

Reviewed by Doug Hynd



While the Orbis “Modern Spiritual Masters” series has certainly been eclectic in its coverage over the years, the inclusion of John Howard Yoder in the series may raise more than a few eyebrows, even among those who are familiar with his work. His inclusion may however be helpful in challenging some common preconceptions as to what “spirituality” is. “Spirituality” is now the

culturally popular generic term by which people can distance themselves from the narrow legalism of “religion”.

The difficulty is that there is no generic undifferentiated “spirituality” just as there is no such thing as a generic form of religion. Both terms require some qualifier that locates what tradition they are talking about, even if it is a tradition that asserts there are no traditions.

As Michael Baxter notes on the back cover, this collection on spirituality is in a very specific tradition and that Yoder

... imparts to us, once again, the wisdom of the Anabaptist tradition: that for Christians, the ‘spiritual’ is never removed from the visible, actual and practical life of discipleship and that at the centre of this life is the peace taught and embodied by Jesus.

As the editors remind us spirituality is ‘... a distinctive way of seeing oneself and neighbour under God’ (p.11). We have in Yoder’s scholarship the working out of the tradition that he inherited, and that he sought to renew, that understood both the love of neighbour and nonviolence as the means by which we imitate the life of Jesus.

What characterised Yoder’s scholarship over his lifetime was not a focus on offering new answers to old questions but that he persisted in asking new questions, or reframing old questions. He was an ‘occasional’ writer in that he responded as a theologian to assignments he received from the church. Yet without being systematic there is an overall coherence to his thought and some consistent underlying themes. This collection is useful in bring some elements of the overall coherence and significant themes into focus.

Yoder is clear that the Anabaptist tradition is not one that centres on belief and creedal definitions. ‘For Yoder, one is not asked to believe in Jesus, but to follow and participate in the life of Jesus (as if, in some way, belief could be separated from following)’ (p20).

In another of the key themes, the importance of community, rather than that of and individually focussed spiritual journey, Yoder is cutting against the grain of the consumer culture in the global North.

Yoder’s vision cannot be instantiated individually, which is to say that following God is a communal activity. ... the role of the worshipping community emerges with considerable clarity as the corpus develops. ... The sacraments therefore, are the embodied behaviours that constitute the church; they are the mode of participating in God’s reconciling work in the world. (p.21)

Yoder’s underlying approach to spirituality in summary is captured in the following comments from his posthumously published volume, *Nonviolence: A Brief History*.

Before it is a social strategy, nonviolence is a moral commitment; before it is a moral commitment, it is a distinctive spirituality. It purposes and fosters a distinct way of seeing oneself and one’s neighbour under God. That “way of seeing” is more like a prayer than it is a shrewd social strategy, though it is both. It is more a faith than a theory, though it is both. (p.43)

The readings are arranged under the following four main headings:

- The Meaning of Jesus
- The Mandate of the Church
- A Cosmic Vision
- Practices and Practical Considerations

While the extracts require the reader’s attention, they are not overly academic in style. Hopefully they will encourage those who have not come across Yoder’s work to go further in engaging with his theology.

As someone who has read most of his publications, I enjoyed the focussed approach that this volume offers. The editors have directed our attention to the centrality of Jesus and the importance of the church in Yoder’s life work. The volume would be useful for an individual guided meditation. It would be even more useful for a group study on Anabaptist discipleship.

Women and Men After Christendom

British Anabaptist (and series editor) Stuart Murray advises that a forthcoming book in Paternoster’s ‘After Christendom’ series is *Women and Men after Christendom* by Fran Porter. This should be out in 2013. The next book due out is *Hospitality and Community after Christendom* by Andrew Francis, due out in 2012.

Groundbreakers



Groundbreakers is a AAANZ initiative to encourage regional activities across Australia and New Zealand. AAANZ members have been appointed as regional representatives to encourage local events and awareness. Each issue of *On The Road* will feature updates from the different regions. For the second report, Doug Sewell asked what each region needs.

What does Melbourne need?

Dale Hess

In Melbourne, we have found that the churches consistently avoid facing the issues of war and peace. In particular, they have been overwhelmingly silent on Australia's involvement in the war in Afghanistan. Over the past couple of years, members of the group loosely known as the Bonhoeffer Collective and Pax Christi have been trying to raise the level of public awareness of the ongoing suffering and tragedy taking place there. This has taken the form of a number of public meetings and vigils at Flinders Street Railway Station, which have featured speakers such as Malalai Joya, the former Afghan Parliamentarian, Prof. Richard Tanter, School of Political and Social Studies of the University of Melbourne, Prof. Joseph Camilleri, Director of the Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University, and Prof. Marilyn Lake, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University. We have also had public screenings of the documentary, *The Garden at the End of the World*, and nonviolent, direct action events at Swan Island, the SAS and ASIS base near Queenscliff, Victoria, and at Talisman Sabre, the biennial joint Australian-United States military exercises near Rockhampton, Queensland.

We took a survey of the churches' involvement in preaching about Afghanistan. There was practically none. Pax Christi decided to raise the issue of the war in Afghanistan through the Victorian Council of Churches. On 12 October, the Victorian Council of Churches, Pax Christi, and St Paul's Cathedral with the support of Act for Peace, Anglicord, Anglican Social Responsibilities Committee, Baptist Church, Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies, Islamic Council of Victoria, Mark the Evangelist Church

(North Melbourne), Social Policy Connections, Quaker Peace and Social Justice Network, TEAR, and the Yarra Institute, held a deeply inspiring critical reflection and lament on ten years of war in Afghanistan, at St Paul's Cathedral. Unfortunately we there was very little response from the Churches; those attending were mainly from the organizing groups.

Pax Christi Australia is an ecumenical peace group, formed in Melbourne about forty years ago. It now has much the same membership as when it began, but who are now forty years older. The commitment to peace is still there, but because of aging, the energy is diminishing, and Pax Christi is considering its future. As the Churches become more inward looking, Christian groups which continue to work for peace become more important. Pax Christi continues to support the Bonhoeffer Collective, and other groups, such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, the Centre for Dialogue, and the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Association.

The Bonhoeffer Collective is a younger group, mainly in their 20s and 30s. They held a very successful week long nonviolent direct action campaign at Swan Island earlier this year. This built on the momentum for the successful action last year.

In October and November, Pace e Bene Australia sponsored a national speaking tour of Kathy Kelly, the inspiring peace activist from the United States. Kathy will be travelling to Sydney, Cairns, Brisbane, Canberra, Launceston, Hobart, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. It is hoped that events with Kathy will provide an opportunity to raise public awareness about the war in Afghanistan and to broaden the involvement of people of all ages to work for peace.



What does Perth need?

Nathan Hobby

One thing the church in Perth needs is an alternative, and this is what the Anabaptist Association might be able to offer, in our small way.

The church in Perth needs an alternative to the dominant streams—the conservative evangelical churches and the megachurches. Straying from these streams is lonely. I know so many disaffected people who want something different to both these movements, but can't find it.

For some, their frustration is the failure of churches to be community. Churches are talking a lot about community lately, but they're having a hard time doing it, because they are pushing against a culture of busyness.

For others, their frustration is that they're not allowed to ask the questions they want to ask, or they're not given the answers they need. There is so little engagement with the mind in many churches that they people feel they have to study theology to find it.

Then there are those who long for a church for whom the peace and justice of the kingdom are central. Yet usually they can only find it in parachurch organisations like TEAR. Is AAANZ just another parachurch alternative? In one way, yes—but in another way, no. We may not have a church, but we do have an entire tradition and a theological framework—and this is actually central to what AAANZ can offer every region: an embodiment, a coherent story to draw on.



Western Australia's Community of Communities

Joshua Hobby

Saturday 19th November saw the first gathering of WACOC - Western Australia's Community of Communities. It was hosted by the Peacetree community in the 'Great Hall' of my house. Twenty-nine adults appeared late in spring afternoon, and countless children - they were running so fast I couldn't tally them. We shared a simple meal, a short time of sharing and then cards.

The hope of the gathering was to form a network of supportive small Christian communities working for justice in small or big ways. I felt unsure if anyone would come. When people came from all over, I felt moved by the diversity of people and their enthusiasm.

My dream for WACOC is Western Australian Christians arising. Its about a strong network of small and local responses adding up to a big response; communities learning and relearning to be a practical support for each other. I want the network to be for everyone, not just leaders.

I guess there's a long way to go for us to move to relevant relationships between varying groups - communities, couples and singles. And I'm still hoping that groups not present will be involved. But we, as a community, feel blessed by our first small step.

www.wacoc.wordpress.com

Contributor Profiles

Dave Andrews can be found in person at West End, Brisbane or online at www.daveandrews.com.au

Doug Hynd is working on a PhD and blogs at <http://doug-subversivevoices.blogspot.com>.

Sandra Lowther-Owens—occasional preacher, part time TESOL teacher, mostly at home mum. Enjoys her Anabaptist contact to add variety and balance to her Anglican evangelical up bringing.

Jeanette Mathews recently completed her PhD. She teaches Old Testament at Charles Sturt University and lives in Canberra.

Jen Noonan is studying at Vose Seminary in Perth and has a keen interest in social justice.

Bessie Pereira is on the AAANZ executive and is director of Oikos, www.oikos.org.au.

Andreana Reale is a member of the Collins St Baptist Church and Urban Seed communities, in Melbourne CBD. She is a student of theology at Whitley College, and is currently contemplating Baptist ordination. Andreana blogs at godofdishes.com.



How to...SUBSCRIBE

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



How to...CONTRIBUTE

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



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

The theme of issue 52 is pastor, preacher, chaplain— a call for reflections on paid/professional ministry, on preaching peace, on teaching Anabaptist concerns, on pastoral care and nonviolence, on the idea of chaplaincy, on what Anabaptist pastoral theology looks like, and other related topics. **The deadline is 9 February 2012.**

#52

Pastor,

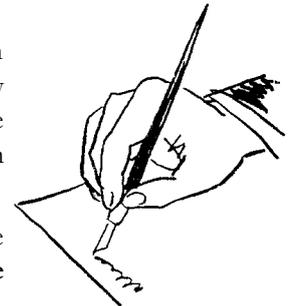
Preacher,

Chaplain

The theme of issue 53 is sexuality. The deadline is 9 May 2012.

The theme of issue 54 is the Amish. The deadline is 9 August 2012

Non-themed submissions are always welcome too.



How to... JOIN

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

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

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

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

