



# ON THE ROAD

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### On The Road

The AAANZ quarterly journal publishes news, articles, book reviews, and resource information. It is published online with a paper edition available for those without computer facilities. (Paper edition A\$25 per year) To be added to the mailing list write:

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**COVER SYMBOL:** The lamb in the midst of briars is a traditional Anabaptist symbol. It illustrates the suffering Lamb of God, who calls the faithful to obedient service and discipleship on the road. This particular rendition is from *Hymnal A Worship Book*. Copyright 1992. Reprinted with permission of Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, PA, USA.

# THE VIEW FROM EPHESIANS FOUR MARK AND MARY HURST ...to prepare all God’s people for the work of Christian service

“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.” (John 1:14, *The Message*)

At Christmas the waiting of the Advent season ends. We celebrate the Word becoming flesh and blood and moving into the neighbourhood. “The neighbourhood” in this instance is all of creation. God takes up residence in the person of Jesus in God’s own creation. This incarnational event is good news for all of creation. Peter Sawtell writes:

*“An incarnational theology all comes down to one piece of good news: this world is important. God enters into this world of dirt and trees, of people and critters. God enters into this world, this physical, Earth-y place. God engages with the creation, with us creatures, because the creation and all of its creatures are loved. God is embodied in this world in order to be reconciled with the whole creation.”* (“Stop and Reflect”, *Eco-Justice Notes*, <http://www.eco-justice.org/E-081212.asp>)

But “the neighbourhood” also means our individual communities. Jesus practised and taught “love of neighbour.” He lived out the love of God in everyday, mundane situations and calls

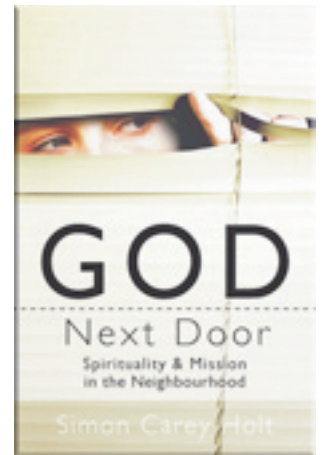
us to the same. Simon Carey Holt writes in *God Next Door: Spirituality & Mission in the Neighbourhood*:

“For Jesus, this business of loving one’s neighbour takes centre stage when it comes to encapsulating the essence of Christian spirituality; in large part, it is a spirituality of neighbourliness.” (72)

Jesus entered our neighbourhood as an act of love and reconciliation. Let us sing along with the angels “Glory to God in highest heaven, and on earth peace to all.”

Andrew Shepherd from New Zealand explores the theme of “home” in an article and book review in this issue.

Along with the mix of articles and book reviews there is the information about the upcoming AAANZ conference to be held in Melbourne. If you have not registered, please take the time to do so and join us for this rich time of fellowship and teaching.



## PRESIDENT’S REPORT DOUG SEWELL

### A Year Past and Opportunities Ahead

I’d like to give you a sense of the year that has passed as well as the opportunities for the year ahead for AAANZ. We are grateful for our mission together... placing Jesus, community and reconciliation at the centre of our faith, life and work.

At a gathering held in February 2008, the AAANZ executive set some clear goals in four broad areas:

**FOCUS** - Articulating and communicating our story - The new AAANZ website at [www.anabaptist.asn.au](http://www.anabaptist.asn.au) has given sharper definition to our identity. Our inspiring story is told in plain English for all to see. You can now listen to podcasts and view the YouTube movie – “Story of the Anabaptists”. The web site is interactive and

allows Conference registrations and donations on line.

**OWNERSHIP** - Growing and sustaining our network - Membership of AAANZ now includes extra benefits. There is a member’s only page on the web site and Members Directory and monthly Prayer Diary. Members could join several free phone tele-chats with Tom Sine, Dave Andrews and Tim Costello. Table fellowships around a meal happened in Sydney and Launceston, which made the tele-chats even more enjoyable.

**MATURITY** - To stand on our own feet - The new home base for the Hursts in Mona Vale, Sydney, has been established and offers hospitality. Mark and Mary have sought to extend the reach of the network in their travels around Australia. Fund raising remains a challenge as it has been for many Christian organisations and we are still well behind target. We rely on regular donations to sustain our continued life.

## **PARTNERSHIPS** - Building relationships

- We stand with others. Jarrod McKenna, Dale Hess and I attended the Historic Peace Churches Asia Conference in Java, Indonesia. Erin and Casper Adson's tour of Australia promoted the new Christian Peacemaker Teams Australasia and gave insight to the reality behind the Israel-Palestine conflict. They generated considerable interest across a broad denominational spread of churches wherever they went. Irene's Place - the peace house lead by Moriah Hurst at Canberra Baptist with Mennonite Mission Network and AAANZ support starts its first round of interns in 2009.

The opportunities for next year are significant.

**CONFERENCE** - The topic of the AAANZ Conference in January near Melbourne – "Communities of the Kingdom - New Monasticism and Anabaptism" - will trace links between the Anabaptists and the new movements of discipleship and faith. The Conference will involve communities such as Jesus Generation in Canberra, Community of the Transfiguration near

Geelong, Urban Neighbours of Hope in Melbourne and Peace Tree in Perth.

**FOCUS ON NEW ZEALAND** - Whilst Australia has been the centre of attention this year a focus in 2009 will be on building membership and a support base in New Zealand. New partnerships need to be forged to plan a mini-conference in New Zealand for January 2010 and the next biennial AAANZ Conference in 2011.

## **MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE**

- I will be attending with Mark and Mary Hurst the world conference to be held in Paraguay, South America, in July 2009. We recognise our identity as part of a global network.

**RE-VISION and MISSION** - The challenge for us both as a network and an association is to avoid becoming establishment and to remain a broad movement of the spirit. We will be promoting the AAANZ Speaker's Bureau, where members can speak in churches about Anabaptism and discipleship. Through our Spiritual Retreats we want to explore with others the meaning of Shalom and to shape our own identity even more.

Please join us on this great journey.

## **A SPIRITUALITY OF HOME-MAKING IN A PROPERTY-DEALING WORLD**

Throughout the course of human history, the metaphor of 'home-making' has played an important role, both in shaping our identity and in defining the appropriate practices for living peacefully within the world. For *tangata whenua*, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, identity (shaped by one's *whakapapa* - *iwi*, *hapu* and *whanau*) manifests itself in the concept of *turangawaewae*, of having a 'place to stand'. It is 'home' on the *marae* where one's identity shaped by relationships with both the living and the dead expresses itself in practices which honour the *mana* of these relationships – in particular, the fundamental relationship with *Papatuanuku*.

Similarly, the concept of 'home-making' was central to the 'colonising' actions of early 'pioneers', though arguably less holistically and at times down-right damaging. The fact that many of the early colonists' actions consisted of attempting to transform this 'new land' into an imitation of the 'home' they had left behind in Europe does not negate the existence of a 'home-making' impulse. Into the 20th Century, NZ's fascination with 'home-making' – of each person owning their own 'slice of paradise' – and the emergence of the ¼ acre sections of suburbia, meant that by the late 1960's NZ had one of the highest home-ownership rates of any country in the world.

But in recent decades many New Zealanders have developed a fascination not with

'home-making', but rather with 'purchasing property' as a form of investment.<sup>1</sup> Typically, such activity has consisted of purchasing a house, making some quick renovations and then re-selling the house a couple of years later. The capital gain, made as a result of the seemingly interminable 'property-boom' is then either put into the bank, re-invested in a new 'property' higher up the real estate ladder, or ultimately allows the individual to purchase one's 'dream home'. Within this schema, houses come to be understood not primarily as 'homes' but rather as commodities, and the critical determinant for deciding where one should domicile has often been the potentiality for economic gain

This contrast between owning a home and 'home-making' was perhaps most vividly demonstrated to me recently during a period of four years living in NZ's largest city. With the property-market booming, it was not unusual to see nine or ten (and sometimes even more) "For Sale" signs at any one time, scattered up and down either side of the relatively small cul-de-sac in which we resided. The arrival of these signs was usually preceded by a period of frenetic activity (two or three months) where the necessary 're-dressing' and preparation for market took place. As well as any unobserved interior changes, such renovation work almost always consisted of the obligatory repainting of the house-exterior, the

erection of a large fence around the section – therefore blocking the house from sight – and the removal of front lawns, trees and other greenery, to be replaced by concrete parking-pads, and/or low-maintenance paving stones, with an occasional pot-plant attempting to deflect from the new barren landscape.<sup>2</sup>

This frenzied activity of house-buying and selling taking place not only in Auckland but around the country during the last decade has been seen almost exclusively in overwhelmingly positive terms, evidence of an energetic and growing economy. There are though, I believe, at least two clear problems stemming from this approach to 'housing' influenced by a reductionist economic vision. The first of these is being increasingly recognised: the decline in social cohesion – what sociologists refer to as a loss of 'social capital'. This is the inevitable consequence of communities that are comprised of isolated, autonomous individuals, whose nomadic existence is shaped by both an internal desire and societal pressures to 'get-ahead' economically, or who, as tenants, live at the mercy of rent increases that may force relocation. A property-purchasing mentality in which economic mobility is linked to geographical mobility, that is, moving-upward economically is seen as dependent on 'moving on', inevitably creates itinerant individuals and therefore transient societies. This loss of interconnectedness, or 'neighbourliness', and an accompanying lament for the relationships of trust and security that formerly characterised NZ society, is one that is increasingly being discussed. But the other negative impact of this constantly changing and transient existence, less frequently discussed, is the potentially devastating effects such a phenomenon has on our relationship with the non-human other, that is, creation itself.

Healthy relationships with fellow humans have the potential to grow and develop into relationships of mutual concern, care and love – what the Bible refers to as relationships of *shalom* – as one spends time being with one another. Likewise, a healthy relationship with the earth, from which we come (humans from humus) and which we are called to care for and 'steward', is dependent on time and proximity. It is as we spend time within creation, inhabiting, dwelling, becoming 'rooted', that we begin to appreciate the complexity of this other. It is during the course of time that we both develop a greater understanding, knowledge, love and affinity with the o/Other –

...the inability to respond to the call to live faithfully as caretakers/stewards of the earth, the house (oikos) of God, the failure to nurture and assist creation in becoming a 'home' of peace and hospitality, results not merely in a major deficiency in our own lives, but also, as we are increasingly discovering, threatens our very existence.

whether the Divine Other, the human other, or creation itself – and yet simultaneously become more aware of how little we really know them. It is face to face with the intricacy and wonder of the o/Other that we begin to appreciate that the sheer otherness of the o/Other means we can never 'know' them completely.<sup>3</sup> This relationship between 'home-making' and time, and the contrast to that of simply owning a property is expressed well by Kimberley Dovey, who states:

*"Home is a relationship that is created and evolved over time; it is not consumed like the products of economic process. The house is a tool for the achievement of the experience of home."*<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between our knowledge of creation – derived from our loving attention and study over a period of time – and our ensuing treatment of it, is similarly expressed well in the etymological link between the words *ecology* and *economy*. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh in their recent book ***Beyond Homelessness*** note that:

"The Greek word *oikos* (eco-) means house or household, thus "ecology" is the *logos* of the *oikos*, that is, the study of the household, and "economics" is the *nomos* of the *oikos*, the law or the rules of the household.... [E]cology is the study of individuals and populations, communities and habitats, life systems and dynamics of the household, and of what is required for living well. Economics is the study of how to respectfully care for and manage the earth so that the various requirements of the household are met and sustained, so that the household is hospitable for all its inhabitants. Ecology is the knowledge necessary for good home economics."<sup>5</sup>

The fundamental problem arising from the property-purchasing phenomenon prevalent within NZ is the extent to which it has depended on and exacerbated a bifurcating of ecology from economics. The intimate relationship between ecology and economics in which becoming 'rooted' and 'making home' enables one to spend time to begin to understand and appreciate the complexities, wonder and mystery of the ecosystem within which we exist (and which accordingly then shapes – dare we use the ubiquitous word – a "lifestyle" which encourages a mutual fruitfulness between human and the non-human other) has come under serious assault in our contemporary age. While certainly not the only factor, the 'property-purchasing' phenomenon can be seen as both the consequence of and simultaneously the motivating energy behind a

sense of 'homelessness' affecting present-day Aotearoa/New Zealand. In our obsession with a narrowly-construed economic-growth we have lost sight of a broader vision of 'home-making', but simultaneously the desire for economic gain, visibly expressed in the phenomenon of 'property-speculation' has led to a further sense of disengagement and distancing from the land. Living transiently, in a 'homeless' existence, the inability to respond to the call to live faithfully as caretakers/stewards of the earth, the house (*oikos*) of God, the failure to nurture and assist creation in becoming a 'home' of peace and hospitality, results not merely in a major deficiency in our own lives, but also, as we are increasingly discovering, threatens our very existence.

The good news is that those who find a new home and dwelling in Jesus<sup>6</sup>, the Home-Making King, who through his life, death and resurrection has 'reconciled to himself all things' (Col1:15-20), are inhabited by the Spirit of Christ who calls us and empowers us again to live as 'home-makers'. In our daily lives, we are to witness to the hope that in Christ all of creation is being made new (Rev 21:5). In contrast to a world of 'postmodern migrants and homeless consumers', it is the children of this Home-Making Father, Bouma-Prediger and Walsh believe, who are called to create homes which are places of permanence, in which we dwell and tell stories; places which are known as safe places providing 'rest' from the hustle and bustle of life and which offer hospitality to those weary of wandering; places of embodied inhabitation in which 'care and cultivation' is extended to both human and non-human inhabitants, and which therefore provide a new orientation and a new community of affiliation and belonging.<sup>7</sup>

As a family we were fortunate to find such a place on the same street inexorably caught in the perpetual change brought about by a buoyant house-market. In stark contrast to the hard lines of newly constructed fences, and the sterility and barren nature of newly 'landscaped' frontages, was the Christian community where we lived at end of the cul-de-sac. Surrounded by mature trees and bordered by a stream, many visitors to the community often spoke of the site as being an oasis, situated as it was in the midst of an urban context. Consisting of a cluster of houses on shared land, with no dividing fences, the sense of physical spatiality seemed to flow over to relationships that were, characterised by hospitality, generosity and mutual concern. This desire to live in harmony with all Others, the desire to create 'homes' that gave witness to the love of God found in Christ, was evident also in the fruitful gardens (both vegetable and flower); the restoration of eroded land by the replanting of native trees, and intensive recycling measures.

Living in such a community in close relationship with others, while full of much joy and delight, as with all close relationships, also involved times of pain, anguish and sorrow. And, herein lies, I suspect, part of the reasoning for the temptation in our contemporary society for a transient existence, living disconnected from each other and the earth. Perhaps the seeking to exist without roots is simply our poor attempt to deafen ourselves to the 'groanings of creation' and the accompanying response demanded by such hearing.

The breaking news of the last few weeks has been the economic meltdown on Wall Street and the potentially calamitous flow-on affect this financial crisis will have on the rest of the world. Here in Aotearoa/NZ, the house-market is slowing rapidly, property prices are dropping, and mortgagee sales on the increase. Whether we really face the possibility of a return to the Great Depression with the accompanying burgeoning in both unemployment and genuine 'homelessness' remains to be seen and is in many ways a frightening prospect. But at the risk of sounding macabre, there may, I suggest, be a silver-lining to the current financial crisis. If the global credit-crunch results in a transformation of our economic visions, one in which social and ecological capital are given the same weighting as monetary capital, then there is the possibility of a serious renovation to our concepts of housing and a renewal of a spirituality of 'home-making'. the inability to respond to the call to live faithfully as caretakers/stewards of the earth, the house (*oikos*) of God, the failure to nurture and assist creation in becoming a 'home' of peace and hospitality, results not merely in a major deficiency in our own lives, but also, as we are increasingly discovering, threatens our very existence. the inability to respond to the call to live faithfully as caretakers/stewards of the earth, the house (*oikos*) of God, the failure to nurture and assist creation in becoming a 'home' of peace and hospitality, results not merely in a major deficiency in our own lives, but also, as we are increasingly discovering, threatens our very existence.

#### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> NZ's steadily declining home-ownership rate is largely attributable to this phenomenon of the purchasing of investment properties which has forced up house prices and therefore made it more difficult for those less economically affluent to purchase a 'home'.

<sup>2</sup> During our four years living on the street, a number of properties were bought and sold two or three times.

<sup>3</sup>Central to such thinking is the assumption that 'knowledge' is not to be construed as 'power-over' the o/ Other – and therefore seen as an oppressive and violent action – but rather true knowledge is suffused in and shaped by love.

<sup>4</sup> Kimberley Dovey, "Home and Homelessness," in

I. Altman and C. Werner, eds., *Home Environments* (New York: Plenum Books, 1985), p.54, quoted in Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2008), 57-8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 185-6.

<sup>6</sup> The imagery of Jesus as providing a new home/dwelling is particularly prominent throughout the Fourth Gospel, with the Greek verb *menein* (to “abide” “stay” “dwell”) used both to indicate the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, but also the “home” that those through faith discover in Jesus. Thus in 1:38-39 the verb *menein* is used three times in describing the search of the disciples and the discovery of a new

“home” in Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> For an extended description of such a phenomenology of home see Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement*, 56-65.

(This article was originally written for *Refresh: The Journal of Spiritual Growth Ministries in Aotearoa/NZ* <http://www.sgm.org.nz/refresh.htm> )

**ANDREW SHEPHERD, NEW ZEALAND** [Andrew is currently engaged in PhD studies exploring the Ethics of Hospitality. He and his wife Ingrid live, with their two children (Julia & Kristin), in Makarora in the South Island, and if not home, can usually be found ‘tramping’ (hiking) or climbing in the outdoors.]

## Book Review

### BEYOND HOMELESSNESS CHRISTIAN FAITH IN A CULTURE OF DISPLACEMENT STEVEN BOUMA-PREDIGER & BRIAN WALSH, EERDMANS, 2008

Elie Wiesel once described the twentieth century as ‘the age of the expatriate, the refugee, the stateless and the wanderer. Never before have so many human beings fled from so many homes.’<sup>1</sup> Recent images on our nightly news, of Georgians fleeing from conflict, or of Haitians left bereft by multiple hurricanes – whose innocent names, reminiscent of one’s old Aunties and Uncles, seems dissonant to the destructive power they unleash – are evidence that the turn of the century has not changed this reality. Indeed the news of the economic meltdown on Wall Street raises the spectre of a return to the *Great Depression* and with it the very real possibility of “homelessness” even for those of us who are fortunate enough to live in the “developed” Western world.

It is this theme of “home” and “homelessness” which provides the central motif in Stephen Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh’s *Beyond Homelessness*. In an insightful and provocative critique on contemporary North American / Western culture, Bouma-Prediger and Walsh argue that our contemporary age is one of dislocation and displacement, indicated most clearly in the socio-economic and ecological issues which the world currently confronts.

According to Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, the mass movement of migrant workers and refugees to Western industrialised countries and the increasing number of “homeless” who live rough in our own cities are evidence of a socio-economic “homelessness”. Drawing on the work of Bob Goudzwaard, Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, the blame for this “homelessness” is laid at the feet of economic globalization, which ‘may look to be little more than a process of trade liberalization’, but they contend is, ‘in fact, a socio-economic force of exclusion.’(95) Such an socio-economic system, with its belief in the ‘ultimate

authority of the market’ (102) combined with the neo-conservative agenda of slashing public spending – especially the privatisation and removal of affordable housing and the dismantling of the “social safety net” – is, for the authors, evidence of ‘the individualism and the privatizing ethos of this ideology [which] locates the moral crisis with the homeless themselves.’(111)

Similarly, it is this ‘myopic ideology of economic growth and “invisible hands”’ (112) which they believe is one of the major contributing factors to our contemporary *ecological homelessness*, one in which Creation, the house (Oikos) of God, is treated as yet another commodity to be used and then discarded. Outlining ten factors/drivers which contribute to ecological deterioration – population; affluence, technology, poverty, current market failure, political failure, globalization, destruction of the sense of place, the impulse for the “new-‘n’-now”, and anthropocentrism – particular emphasis is given to the belief that ‘[o]ur economic system is broken and needs serious repair.’(176) Ultimately, however, for Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, while “homelessness” is most clearly manifest in the socio-economic and ecological spheres, the faults of our economic system and globalization are rooted in ‘larger cultural, ethical, and religious factors that too often are not acknowledged or fully appreciated.’(171)

It is these cultural ethical and religious factors which our authors turn their attention to in outlining the *Postmodern Homelessness* which they believe characterises modern late capitalistic societies. In their interpretation, disillusioned with the modernist myth of *utopia*, postmodern culture has deconstructed the very notion of a metaphysical *home*. The postmodern self, valorised by contemporary authors such as Salman Rushdie, lives as a migrant, a vagabond, a

tourist. Unwilling to put down roots – which would involve the oppressive action of boundary-fixing – the postmodern self, has no centre or destination, but lives transiently. As Zygmunt Bauman, whom Bouma-Prediger and Walsh quote, states:

*The vagabond is a pilgrim without a destination; a nomad without an itinerary. The vagabond journeys through an unstructured space; like a wanderer in the desert, who knows only of such trails as are marked by his own footprints, and blown off again by the wind the moment he passes, the vagabond structures the site he happens to occupy at the moment, only to dismantle the structure again as he leaves. Each successive spacing is local and temporary – episodic.*<sup>2</sup>

In stating that ‘this talk of postmodern homelessness is little more than a reflection of the rootlessness of the consuming modernist ego’ (260) the authors perceptively note that the postmodern self is both the consequence and condition of late capitalist culture. Rootless and mobile, the postmodern self, shares the same anthropology as late globalism, with the self viewed not as a fixed identity, *at home* with itself, but rather as a *no-self*, which gains its identity as it consumes. ‘[P]ostmodern talk of difference, heterogeneity, migrancy, exile, nomadism, marginality and the like’, Bouma-Prediger and Walsh conclude, ‘functions to provide ideological legitimacy and comfort to the forces of global capitalism.’ (263)

In response to this socio-economic, ecological and psycho-spiritual homelessness and the culture of displacement which undergirds it, Bouma-Prediger and Walsh offer the biblical narrative as the basis for the creation of a new culture. Punctuated with short and pithy biblical interludes between the major chapters, Bouma-Prediger and Walsh sketch a theology of home – of the *Homemaking God*, the God of Creation and covenant, who despite humanity’s disregard of the covenant and desecration of the land which leads to exile, is, in Christ, the *Homemaking King*, creating a new people. In contrast to the ‘exclusionary nature’ of the ‘dominant *habitus*’, “way of being” of globalization (107), the Church, shaped by a different story, is to exhibit the ‘virtues of shalom’:- peaceableness, justice, compassion and wisdom (212-224). Rather than the aimless wanderings of the migratory, vagabond/tourist of postmodern culture, it is the Church, Bouma-Prediger and Walsh assert, living as a *Sojourning Community*, which is called to make “home” in the *Empire* even as it awaits with expectant hope the *Great Homecoming* when the *Homemaking Father* will come and make his “home” with us.

In their sweeping assessment of contemporary Western culture it could be argued

that Bouma-Prediger and Walsh run the risk of simplifying very complex issues. This is particularly the case in chapters three and four, which with broad generalisations tends to portray globalism as some human-controlled malevolent scheme designed specifically to bring about inequality and inequity. While sympathetic to their concerns, I can imagine the critique that those more economically-savvy than myself, would make of such a depiction. One wonders whether perhaps attention to the concept of ‘powers’ and ‘principalities’ and the way in which human constructs and institutions designed for good, can be distorted, would assist their argument here.

Similar potential criticisms at the brevity of their analysis of ecological homelessness and postmodern homelessness could be counteracted by noting the author’s deeper reflections on these respective themes elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> These however, are minor quibbles. Indeed while the broad scope of Bouma-Prediger and Walsh’s analysis could be read as a weakness, it is also undoubtedly the greatest strength of the book. By offering an integrative metaphor of “home” and “homelessness”, the authors powerfully demonstrate the interrelationship between the socio-economic, political, and ecological realities that the contemporary world confronts and the cultural, ethical and religious values which underpin such “homelessness”. Even more significantly, their creative theology which calls the church to the activity of “home-making”, offers a new imaginative vista, for those seeking to live faith-fully and hope-fully in such times of dislocation and displacement.

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#### (Footnotes)

- <sup>1</sup> Elie Wiesel, “Longing for Home,” in *The Longing for Home*, ed. S. Rouner Leroy (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1996), 19.
- <sup>2</sup> (Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 240.
- <sup>3</sup> See J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995). and Stephen Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

(This article was originally written for *Stimulus: The NZ Journal of Christian Thought and Practice*)

-ANDREW SHEPHERD, NEW ZEALAND

## COMMUNITY MINISTRY AS EVANGELISM?

Naïve but enthusiastic, I shuffled into the Opportunity Shop under the cover of the skirts of my senior pastor. My first day at work in the inner city and I was to help do surveys of community members about what they would like their local church to do - What would make them come along to church? Rowena lined me up with one of the op shop patrons. His hair was drawn back in a dark bandana. The frizzy greyness of his beard covered most of his blue singlet. And every bit of skin that was visible was marked well with tattoos – all the way down his arms to the numerous, very chunky rings on his nine and a half fingers! My goodness!

“What sort of music would you like in church?” I began. “What would make you come to church?” My questions didn’t seem to penetrate at all. My new bikey/biker buddy was happy to talk, but he had a restricted range of conversation topics – knives, guns and numchuckers. “How could our church help you?” was my next question. He immediately turned back to his favourite topic - knives, guns and numchuckers. He wanted me to know he had lots of them at home and not a few hidden on him. He wanted me to know how competent he was with these tools of destruction and harm. He wanted me to know how much damage he could do to someone he didn’t like. I wondered quietly (very quietly) if I was in that category.

Needless to say I didn’t get any responses on my survey that day. My bikey friend hung around however. He helped fix things in the op shop. He helped sort fruit and vegetables. He was banned from the op shop for bad language and racism on more than one occasion.

The HopeStreet team worked at treating him like a person rather than the big scary monster he worked hard to portray. One day I found him in tears when a godly elderly volunteer had challenged him about being healed “on the inside” and the pain of his childhood of abuse rolled out uncontrollably. One Mothers’ Day he presented flowers and chocolates to two mothers, not his own, but people he had come to love. When a visiting youth team stayed overnight in the back court-yard he patrolled outside all night to make sure they were safe.

As his health deteriorated, people visited him in hospital. On one visit he just came out with it, “I have made my peace with God, I’m not afraid to die if that’s what happens”.

Would my bikey friend have found peace with God unless we had been involved in community ministry? Would all the community ministry effort that was put into his life have been wasted if he didn’t find God? Phrased more

generally, these are the key theological questions that we struggle with in regard to community ministry. Is there any other way to reach those on the margins other than getting involved very practically in their lives and inviting them to share in our lives? Is such practical community ministry valuable only as a strategy for evangelism?

### Our immediate dilemma

A few preliminary remarks before we answer these two questions. Firstly, I understand “community ministry” as any initiative by a congregation that seeks to enter the lives of those in need in a material or social way. It might be providing food, shelter, a place to meet, friendship, counseling, or education.

Secondly we should be aware that “community ministry” has been a normal part of the church’s activity for all of church history except the most recent bit. The early church, for example, made provision for widows (Acts 6:1-6). During the plagues the Christians became visible as the only ones who would respectfully bury the bodies of the dead. In the Middle Ages the church was the major institution of social support. And the modern missions movement built schools and hospitals across the globe as it preached the good news of Christ crucified, risen and living. It is only since the mid 1800’s that the idea that Christians should restrict themselves to verbal proclamation of the gospel only has had any currency. This is generally attributed to the strength of modernism, which belittled the idea of a supernatural world and drew a sharp division between the spiritual and the “scientifically verifiable”. Unknowingly perhaps, the Christians went along with this and stayed in the “spiritual” category.

In the early twentieth century, modernism was optimistic that humanity was progressing so well with the accumulation of knowledge and technology that soon people would be able to solve all the problems they faced and create a new utopia. Some theologians picked this up and hypothesized that the coming of the Kingdom of God would be brought about by this inevitable movement of human progress. This became known as the “social gospel” and was associated with liberal theology and the sort of activity we now call “community ministry”. The reaction was for conservatives to assert the “fundamentals” of the faith and to distance themselves from any social involvement. Thus began “fundamentalism” and a polarization of social engagement with almost no one taking the middle ground.

As the twentieth century became the twenty-first, we found post-modernism making a different understanding more popular. Rationale verification of things is less valued so the spiritual



realm is considered quite credible (though discerning one spirit from another is not in vogue). Further there is a more holistic view of life. There is a sense that everything is connected to everything else. So the world is seeing the falseness of the dichotomy of modernism, and this is a helpful push for the church in reclaiming the holistic view of life and salvation that the Bible presents. From the Lausanne Covenant in 1974 to the Micah Declaration in 2001, evangelicals across the world are affirming that loving God and spreading his word means not just talking but engaging with people in their material and social need. It means community ministry.

### **Is community ministry necessary for evangelism amongst those in need?**

To be effective, evangelism amongst the poor and needy must include a practical response to material needs (what we have called community ministry). We see this in the ministry of Jesus and in our own experience. Jesus begins his ministry with the assertion that the good news is for the poor (Lk 4:18), and he continues this intentional focus on those who are outside the established religious circles and outside the circles of social acceptability and consequently being denied a life of fullness. He spends time with women, children, lepers, Samaritans and drunkards (Lk 8:1-3; Mt 18:1-5, 8:1-3; 11:19). He demonstrates both God's passion for those on the edge of society and God's concern for all of their needs – physical, social and spiritual. The woman who suffered with an issue of blood for twelve years, for example, is not only healed physically by Jesus, but he makes sure that the watching crowd know that she is now a ritually clean person so that she can be welcomed back into her community, and he makes the point that this is a faith encounter (Mk 5:25-34). Arguably all of Jesus' miracles, except perhaps walking on water, bring healing to the material needs of suffering people. Luke summarises Jesus ministry consistently as "preaching and healing" (Lk 6:18, 9:11). His message of wholeness and new life was not only spoken but it was being brought about in the lives of those he touched. For Jesus, evangelism necessitated community ministry.

Without a practical response, our message of love lacks credibility and is rarely welcomed. "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" says John (1 Jn 3:17). "Empty stomachs have no ears" says the African saying. On the positive side, an authentic response to people in need brings an openness not only amongst those who are helped, but in the wider community as well. Who else but the Salvos can go into pubs on a Friday nights to hand out Christian magazines? Their reputation for doing good among those who are seen as the least goes

before them opening the doors. Experience confirms that community ministry is a necessary part of evangelism amongst those in need.

### **Is evangelism community ministry's only value?**

The familiar parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) is instructive here. The story that Jesus tells is in response to a lawyer's question, firstly about what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what the law says, and commends the lawyer's response. He is to love God with all that he is and love his neighbour as he loves himself. This is the classic summary of the Jewish law, elementary stuff for the lawyer. A few points are important to note here. Firstly, the second commandment is "like" the first (Mt 22:38). That is to say it is just as great, the two complete each other, the two sides of the one coin; they are inseparable. This is John's testimony also (1 Jn 4:21). We should also note that the great commission (Mt 28:18-20) is a call to make disciples, primarily by teaching obedience to Jesus' commandments – namely loving God and loving neighbour.

Now I don't think I need to argue that loving God is a core component of Christian discipleship. What we see clearly here is that loving our neighbour is an equally core component of discipleship.

In response to the lawyer's further question, "Who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10:29), Jesus uses a parable to unpack his idea of what a neighbour is. Being a neighbour means reaching out compassionately, and at significant personal cost, to help someone in need, in a very practical way, without being put off by the fact that they are your sociological arch-enemy. Jews wouldn't eat with mixed-race Samaritans (Jn 4:9). They felt the Samaritans had corrupted the religious system (Jn 4:20). But the Samaritan is the neighbour in the parable, reaching out compassionately to a Jew in trouble, despite years of ethnic rivalry.

In terms of Acts 1:8, Samaritans were the "E2" category – same language but different culture. Baptists (and Christians on the whole) are predominantly a middle-class suburban bunch – just look how closely the big Baptist churches match that demographic in Sydney. Given this fact, the Samaritans in our own context are a wide variety of people for whom life has turned bad – anyone without a permanent address, anyone with an addiction, a dependence on social security or English as a second language. They are the types of people that sometimes make us mad. We can't understand why they can't get their act together. In our democratic land of opportunity with its comprehensive social security system, it looks like they have had opportunities but haven't taken them. Reaching out in compassion where these people are in need - this is Jesus' picture of what it

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means to be a neighbour. This is what community ministry is.

Community ministry is a core component of our discipleship, not merely a good strategy for evangelism amongst those in need. We see this illustrated in the ministry of Jesus in the story of the healing of the ten lepers (Lk 17:12-19). Of the ten only one returns to thank Jesus. Only 10% of the lepers that were healed reflected any spiritual change, despite the very significant physical change for good that Jesus brought into their lives. Jesus is disturbed by this but he doesn't withdraw the healing of the other nine or regret the gift that he has given them.

As we engage in community ministry we find ourselves often in a similar situation. We long

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that people will embrace all of what God offers; to know fullness of life through an intimate relationship with Jesus. But our engagement with those in need in our communities is a discipleship issue, not merely a strategic one; it is a moral and ethical one. Hence we give freely in the same way we have freely received and watch for what God will do in the lives of our new friends on the edge of our communities. My bike friend hasn't met God face to face yet, and his language is still not always edifying, but he is a world away from the bubbling pot of anger and hatred that I met on that first day. - **COLIN SCOTT, SYDNEY**



## QUAKER PEACEMAKING

In October 1976 my wife, Marion, and I travelled to South Africa on our way back to Australia after living in the United States for a year. We arrived in Cape Town about five months after the Soweto Uprising. Our experience there illustrates what a small community of committed people can do. It illustrates the prophetic role of breaking the silence by Truth-telling and the priestly role of community-building, ending the isolation and changing the story to affirm life.

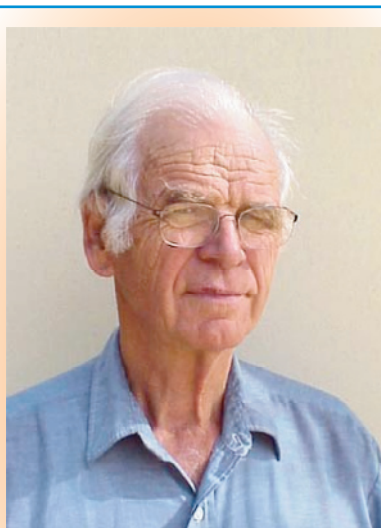
Thousands of black students in Soweto had walked out of classes to protest the cultural imperialism of being forced to learn their subjects in Afrikaans. A peaceful march had been organised by the Soweto Students' Representative Council with the support of the Black Consciousness Movement and their teachers, but armed police blockaded the march and tried to break up the demonstration with tear gas. Chaos followed and the police fired on the crowd; the violence escalated and 23 people were killed on the first day, including some killed by the students. The police responded the next day with massive reinforcements and greater firepower and hundreds were killed.

The Cillie Commission was convened to investigate the cause of the riots. The Minister for Justice, James Kruger, claimed that it was the work of 27 outside agitators who travelled the country in three cars (they must have been rather cramped, riding with nine persons in each car). Hendrik van

der Merwe and Paul Hare, Quakers from Cape Town Meeting, presented evidence to the Commission. They documented eye-witness accounts of what happened. They also presented evidence of how nonviolent conflict resolution methods could have been used for crowd control.

To testify before the Commission and present evidence that the government was trying to suppress, especially at a time of such tension, required great courage. The Meeting bravely supported those who testified, although within the Meeting there were one or two people who were suspected of being spies for the secret police (Bureau of State Security; BOSS). The evening we arrived in Cape Town we were invited to a braai-vleis (barbeque) (or a braai-veg for us vegetarians) at the Meeting House, held in conjunction with the Institute of Race Relations, to thank those who testified. This is an example of breaking the silence - Truth-telling (prophetic witness) and community-building (priestly witness).

After the riots, Quakers were involved in facilitating meetings of women, who gathered to try to understand the reasons for the uprising. Many people were surprised and frightened by the outbreaks of violence in the townships near Cape Town. The response to the first open meeting was unexpectedly successful, crossing colour, status and cultural barriers. This meeting was followed up with small group meetings. A "drop-in centre" for women was established near Cape



*Paul Hare, now Professor Emeritus, The Social Studies Unit, Ben Gurion University of the Negev. In addition to testifying before the Cillie Commission, he set up the ambulance program and many other peace initiatives.*

Town, where women could come, discuss, share and build friendships. This is an example of ending the isolation (priestly witness).

Another activity Friends undertook after the violence was to hold a nonviolence workshop to develop skills for dealing with conflict. They were also involved in a third party approach to conflict resolution. During the uprising the police were brutally beating schoolchildren at a place where coincidentally a group of Boy Scouts were camping. When the Scouts saw what was happening, they went up to the police and demanded they stop. This involvement from a neutral third party was enough to make the police stop the beatings. Quakers from Cape Town contacted Boy Scouts living in the nearby black and coloured townships, and hoped that through training, they could form a “crisis corps.” The trained Scouts would be available to give emergency first aid, and be a “presence.” They would also be able to be reliable observers.<sup>1</sup>

Cape Town Friends purchased a Toyota van which they converted into an ambulance, which they stationed in a black township. During an outbreak of violence the police would spray the area with bullets; shooting indiscriminately. Anyone who turned up seeking medical aid at the hospital was judged to be guilty. The ambulance permitted innocent people to be transported to medical aid

from friendly doctors, and also allowed the staff to act as observers. In riot situations it is important to have accurate information about events.

However the function of the ambulance service went beyond that. There was a real need in the black and coloured townships near Cape Town to have transportation for medical emergencies and at other times when medical help was needed. The cost and unavailability of commercial ambulances and taxis made it extremely difficult to get to aid. The clinics in the townships were only open during daylight hours. Before the ambulance was available, a pregnant woman would have to walk to the clinic, give birth, and then three hours later, walk home. The ambulance served as a way to build relationships between Cape Town Quakers and the people of the townships. The third party approach and the ambulance project, described above, are examples of changing the story to affirm life.

#### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> For further information about a third party approach, see A. Paul Hare and Herbert Blumberg, *Liberation Without Violence: A Third Party Approach*, Rex Collin Publishers, 1977, 368 pp.

- **DALE HESS, MELBOURNE**



## THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

The semi-regular rerun of the argument over opening the meeting of the Australian Parliament with the recital of the 'Lord's Prayer' has had its run in the media with the usual arguments trotted out.

The only relatively fresh contribution to the debate was the suggestion by Senator Bob Brown of the Greens that a few minutes silence would be appropriate given the volume of words that flowed forth and were faithfully recorded in Hansard every day. That certainly is a point worth considering. In the midst of the constant noise and verbal aggression that characterises both chambers of Parliament, not to mention the thirty second media grabs outside the chambers, a few minutes of disciplined silence would be no bad thing.

In the media debate, the Christendom mentality was still well and truly represented in letters to the editor with references to Australia being a Christian country and the Christian influence on our laws and heritage. While the latter point is interesting and often undervalued, its

relevance as an argument to retain the practice of the use of the 'Lord's Prayer' in opening Parliament has never been very clear to me. The reference to any country as a 'Christian' country gets me going. It really is bad theology in terms of its lack of understanding of the church as the new people of God from every tribe and nation.

To push the debate along further, let me offer a few random thoughts and questions from a viewpoint that is critical of Christendom mentality evidenced in much of the Christian discussion of this issue.

Let's start with a bit of theology. The so-called "Lord's Prayer" is more appropriately titled "the Disciples' Prayer". It was taught by Jesus to a motley group of followers who were on the social and political margins in Palestine, an occupied territory on the edge of the Roman Empire. It was a prayer that in its content was, and still is, subversive of the governing assumptions of the Empire. It is a prayer in which God was more important than Caesar, and displayed a

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commitment to an economics of enough, rather than excess, and of forgiveness as a basic pattern for social life.

The disciple's prayer then is a prayer for the church - a prayer to shape the character of our life as a community that seeks to explore and experiment now with the life of the age to come, "on earth as in heaven". It should not be a rote piece of religious, vaguely sacred verbiage rushed through without intonation or feeling. Its recital in Parliament in fact has the effect of subverting the subversive character of the prayer by giving a flavour of vague conservative religiosity to what is and should be a "secular" institution in the sense used by the current PM in an article he wrote back in 2006. Christians he argued should ... *always hold a state somewhat at arm's length, but in their engagement with the state, they should take a*

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*consistent ethical position, which is always based on a cause of social justice or the interests of the marginalized...I strongly defend our parliament and our polity as being both secular and pluralist, but within that secular pluralist polity, you can't deny Christians having their voice, just as you can't deny anyone else having their voice.*

Christians if they took the disciple's prayer seriously should be moving immediately to have it withdrawn from the formal proceedings of Parliament. It is an unacceptable hangover of Christendom. Its current use in that context is a profaning of its character and a mockery of its original intent and meaning.

- **DOUG HYND, CANBERRA**



## NONVIOLENT ACTION AS PUBLIC THEOLOGY

In August 2005 a group known as Christians Against Greed joined a rowdy protest against a conference of global corporations at the Sydney Opera House, and found themselves sharing the Eucharist with riot police and anarchists. On Human Rights Day that year, four activists calling themselves Christians Against All Terrorism broke into and attempted a "citizens' inspection" of the Pine Gap spy base. One week after their trial ended in 2007, five people walked into a war games zone at Shoalwater Bay to play Frisbee with defence personnel.

These events were all very public and deeply theological. Yet we tend not to consider them, and other actions like them, as examples of *public theology* - a term for the process of the church thinking and speaking to the general public about contemporary issues. As part of the domestication of the First World Church, this concept seems to have been reduced to polite commentary in corporatized mass media.

We need a broader understanding of 'public theology' that includes public action on the part of the church (or members of the church) that speaks directly into the public sphere. Christian nonviolent direct action should be seen in this light. Both the acts themselves and the public statements made by the actors are clearly designed to articulate a Christian message in response to critical problems of their time.

Australia does not have a tradition of religiously motivated civil disobedience that is found in the United States and to a lesser extent the UK. Nevertheless, in recent times there has been a small re-emergence of radical Christian protest.

Such action, at its best, witnesses in a powerful way to an alternate set of values in a way that does not privilege Christianity or require adherence to make sense, but does draw on Christian resources and weaves together theological as well as political critique. It emphasises the idea of communities of praxis that embody the kingdom vision in both their internal relations and their approach to their task. And it opens up new spaces for communicating a prophetic critique of the ways things are and a vision of how things could be.

In short, Christian nonviolent direct action is another form of public theology, consistent with good praxis, which opens up new fields for prophetic Christian witness.

(This is a brief summary of a larger paper presented to the recent 'Christian Mission in the Public Square' conference in Canberra. The full paper can be found at <http://paceebene.wordpress.com/2008/10/07/christian-nonviolent-direct-action-as-public-theology> )

- **JUSTIN WHELAN, SYDNEY** (Justin works as a policy adviser in NSW Parliament and researches social movements and nonviolent activism in Australia. He is also a facilitator with Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service)

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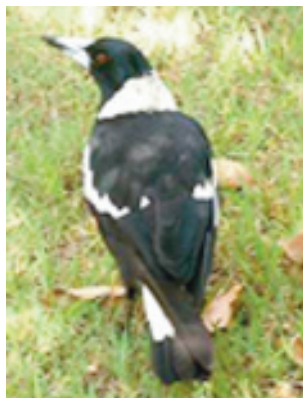
## THE CALL OF KOOLBARDI AN ABORIGINAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Some time ago I had the opportunity to spend some time with Noongar Elder, Noel Nannup; a man I have learned so much from. In one of our many discussions about life and spirituality he alerted me to a practice within Noongar spirituality that I have since embraced as a part of my own spiritual practice.

He explained to me that Koolbardi (or magpie as we white folk call them), represents a mixture of the potential for the positive aspects of life and the more negative aspects. As I remember it, he explained that 'Munarch' (white cockatoo) represents the more positive side of things, and 'Waardong' (crow) represents the darker side. Koolbardi represents the opportunity for both influences.



The Noongar practice that Noel introduced me to is as follows. When you hear Koolbardi call in the morning, it



is time to reflect on what your thoughts and actions will be today. Will they be influenced by the darker aspects like hatred, selfishness, deception or greed, (etc.) or will they be centred on love, generosity, truth and justice (etc.).

He pointed out that Koolbardi also calls at night. This provides an opportunity to reflect on your thoughts and actions from the day - were they centred around selfishness...(etc.)?



I find this practice practical, simple and meaningful. The great advantage of this practice for me is that Koolbardi are abundant in our area and can often be heard. They provide

a simple reminder to reflect on my thoughts and actions.

**- Tim Williams, Waroona, WA**

### Book Review

## CHANGING PARADIGMS PUNISHMENT AND RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE,

PAUL REDEKOP, HERALD PRESS, 2007

### To Punish or Not to Punish?

There is a vast literature on the "problem of punishment", especially in the criminal justice sphere. Punishment is considered a problem for both philosophical and practical reasons. It is a philosophical problem because it is extremely difficult to justify as a moral good the deliberate infliction of avoidable suffering on another human being, yet without such justification punishment is indistinguishable from the evil it seeks to redress. It is a practical problem because, for all the benefits claimed for it, punishment doesn't seem to work. The urge to punish is deeply ingrained in human nature, and its use is as old as human history itself. But the futility of employing the negative power of punishment to bring about positive change is everywhere apparent in social experience. Research suggests that the more severely someone is punished, the more likely he or she is to re-offend.

In this caring and accessible book, Mennonite sociologist Paul Redekop explores

the moral and social perplexities surrounding the practice of punishment. His basic thesis is that punishment cannot be adequately justified on either moral or utilitarian grounds, and ought therefore to be expunged entirely from our repertoire of responses to conflict. His critique of the problems surrounding punishment covers familiar territory; his proposal that society can do entirely without punishment is more innovative, though it moves in broadly the same direction as the excellent "Restorative Justice City" model developed by Dan van Ness of Prison Fellowship International.

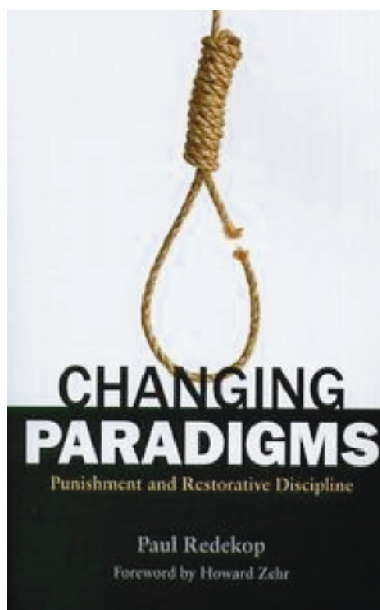
Most of the advocates of restorative justice consider it to be a complement to, rather than a replacement for, the mainstream retributive system. Not so Redekop. *"I would argue not only that a comprehensive restorative justice system must replace the system of retributive justice, but also that a key part of this transformation must be the elimination of punishment."* (74) He rejects the notion of "restorative punishment" favoured by

some thinkers, but he does allow for “restorative sanctions”, which in some cases might even include containment or confinement in the interest of protecting victims. Restorative sanctions differ from punishment inasmuch as their purpose is not to harm or degrade the recipient but to meet the needs of all those affected by the crime, including the offender.

According to many theorists, one important function punishment serves is as a public denunciation of certain behaviours. For Redekop, this purpose can still be provided for in a restorative system, especially through community participation in restorative justice programmes and by public disclosure of the sanctions and outcomes that emerge in the process.

It is here I think that more work needs to be done by restorative justice proponents. We have been very good at what might be called “private justice”: the resolution of conflict between individual parties. But we are less adept at reflecting on the “public” dimensions of justice: the need for norms that transcend the exigencies of particular cases and that give society agreed standards of fairness and balance. Like it or not, when severe pain has been unjustly inflicted on innocent victims, there is a visceral feeling in the community that those who caused this pain must suffer pain in return, for it is only the experience of pain that is capable of accessing the enormity of what has been done. The social institution of punishment, for good or for ill, exists in order to ensure that some measure of reciprocal pain is experienced by the wrongdoer. From one angle this may seem crude. But there could just be a true moral insight here that needs to be respected, and provided for in restorative mechanisms, rather than rejected as primitive or vengeful.

I accept that it is impossible to justify punishment *solely* on the grounds of creating an equity of suffering, and that justice must never be equated with penal retaliation. But I believe there is an important truth to the common human intuition that justice requires a wrongdoer to participate, in some meaningful way, in the pain he or she has unleashed (a truth, incidentally, reflected in biblical teaching on the subject). If restorative justice alternatives are to satisfy the public need to know that justice has been served, the level of suffering involved in assuming responsibility for addressing the wrong done has to be visible. It has to be obvious that offenders have shared adequately (though not necessarily equally or



punitively) in the pain that consumes the victim. I am not convinced that the language of “meeting needs”, favoured by Redekop and others, will ever be enough to satisfy this instinctive dimension to justice. Which is why I prefer to think of redeeming the notion of punishment from its retributive captivity rather than driving it away entirely into the wilderness of disuse.

Redekop has an excellent discussion of punishment and the family. He draws together research findings that show that corporal punishment of children does considerable harm to their development, and he identifies several common myths or

assumptions that underlie the widespread habit of punishing kids in order to secure compliance. He also shows how non-physical punishments may be every bit as damaging to them as spanking or hitting. He urges parents to replace punishment with modes of restorative discipline, rooted in a fundamental respect for the child’s human dignity and autonomy.

Family violence is an enormous problem in New Zealand, as in many other countries. In recent weeks, there have been two horrific cases before our courts of infants being brutally tortured, then beaten to death by caregivers. When New Zealand became the first English-speaking country in the world in 2007 to repeal the legal right for parents to use “reasonable force” in disciplining their children, the outcry from the conservative Christian community was deafening. Christian opponents of the law change have now succeeded in forcing a public referendum on whether the repeal should be reversed. Hopefully leading up to this referendum next year there will be widespread debate in churches about the issue, and Redekop’s discussion will be a valuable resource to recommend, even if it needs to be supplemented with a more extended biblical and theological reflection than he is able to offer.

In the remaining chapters, Redekop critiques reliance on punishment in the education system and looks briefly at alternatives to punishment in responding to human rights abuses. He also explores how wider cultural factors feed and sustain our most punitive tendencies, and outlines some strategies for breaking the punitive habit (which in some respects resembles a drug habit).

**Changing Paradigms** is one of those books that leaves you with a “yes, but” kind of

reaction. Redekop's critique of the morality and efficacy of punishment is persuasive, and his description of alternative restorative mechanisms for addressing conflict is helpful and hopeful. But I am left with two nagging questions. One is whether his definition of punishment as the infliction of *harm* (rather than pain) skews the pitch in a wholly negative direction, and prevents a more nuanced assessment of the public justice needs that punishment seeks to satisfy, albeit ineffectually and often terribly harmfully. Not all pain is harmful, nor should we seek to avoid all pain.

The other is whether Redekop's abolitionist agenda could ever gain political traction. One of his recommended "ways ahead" in the closing pages is for us to give up the belief that we can, or should ever seek to, control anyone else's behaviour,

whether by punishments or rewards. At a private level, there may be some truth to this. But is it viable at the public level? The entire institution of law rests on the premise that the state has a duty to regulate the behaviour of citizens for the collective good, and especially for the protection of the vulnerable. Restorative justice certainly gives us good cause to call for a reduction, moderation and radical redesign of the penal functions of the current legal system. But whether it requires a wholesale abandonment of the principle of enforced social control is, I think, another matter.

- Chris Marshall,  
Victoria University of  
Wellington, New Zealand



## Book Review

### SEEING THE WORD REFOCUSING NEW TESTAMENT STUDY

MARKUS BOCKMUEHL, BAKER, 2006

One of the most exciting developments currently underway in biblical scholarship is the recovery of so-called "theological interpretation". By this is meant interpretation that is concerned primarily with the *theological* meaning, not just the literary and historical contours, of the biblical writings – that is, with what the text tells us about *God* and with how the text enables us to hear the voice of *God* speaking *truthfully* to us. It seeks to press beyond speculation on the plethora of historical, literary and hermeneutical problems that have long preoccupied academic scholarship in order to encounter and comprehend the word of *God*. Such an interpretive endeavour constitutes a genuine *recovery* of the church's historic practice, for the church has always confessed that the intended purpose of canonical scripture is to mediate the knowledge of *God* to attentive and obedient listeners, not to keep critically detached scholars entertained. This faith-based approach to biblical interpretation has long been treated with contempt in the modern academy, with its vaunted but illusory objectivism. But it is an approach far more congruent with post-modernity's recognition of the perspectival and self-involving nature of all human knowledge.

In this intriguing book, Markus Bockmuehl takes a long hard look at the current state of New Testament studies, which has all but lost any sense of theological accountability. Bockmuehl is an expert guide on the subject, with an impressive, even intimidating, grasp of the vast primary and secondary literature relating to his discipline. His

basic thesis is that New Testament studies is in deep crisis, for it no longer has any integrating methodological focus nor even any commonly agreed subject matter. It has fractured into a multitude of semi-autonomous pursuits and has fallen victim to every conceivable whim of intellectual and ideological fashion. It is also riven with disagreement on almost every critical issue. Even the current consensus about the importance of recognising Jesus' Jewishness is, Bockmuehl contends in the final chapter, only skin deep.

What is to be done about this malaise? How can New Testament study regain some sense of common purpose or methodological integration? The answer does not lie in developing a more refined and nuanced historical method, nor in fashioning ever greater hermeneutical sophistication. What is needed is an approach to New Testament interpretation that is congruent with the theological subject matter of the documents themselves and with the theologically unifying effect of their canonical inclusion and arrangement.

Bockmuehl offers two constructive proposals in this respect. First, he proposes that New Testament scholars should engage more deliberately with the "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of the texts they study in order to better grasp their significance. That is to say, they should recognise that the texts have continued to exercise a formative influence over the belief and practice of the Christian community down through history, and that this influence tells

us something about the meaning of the texts themselves. Just as the significance of an early period in Winston Churchill's life can only be fully appreciated in light of our knowledge of the vast historical influence he exercised later in his life, so the meaning of the New Testament writings can be properly grasped only in light of their subsequent dogmatic and practical impact on the believing community.

In exploring the New Testament's effective history, Bockmuehl thinks that we should privilege the first 150 years of the text's afterlife. This is because the "living voice" of individual and collective memory of the apostles' teaching was still operative down until the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. During this period there were still people alive who could recall the oral testimony of parents or grandparents whose own parents or grandparents had personally heard the apostles or their close associates teach and preach.

Bockmuehl's second proposal is that scholars should take seriously the implied readers/readings of the New Testament writings. He demonstrates how the biblical authors envisaged a particular kind of reader when constructing their work, so that what they actually say can be best appreciated when considered from the perspective of such readers. The implied readers of the New Testament are those who have a personal commitment to Christ, who have undergone (and continue to undergo) a religious, moral and intellectual conversion, who are open to the inspiration of the Spirit and, who, crucially,

are located in ecclesial settings. They are not religiously neutral or critically detached outsiders, but people who are profoundly involved in the divine realities of which the text speaks.

Moreover, for all their differences, the New Testament authors all assume that there is an essential agreement or commonality underlying their apostolic witness. Peter and Paul, for example, do not regard each other as arch rivals, with one championing a Jewish gospel, the other a quite different gospel for Gentiles, though this is how they are often construed in modern scholarship. Instead they see each other as equal partners in the work of the same gospel, even if their relationship was sometimes strained. Subsequent Christian tradition certainly considered the two apostles to be compatible witnesses to a common truth, as is shown by their inclusion together in the same canon and by the way their relationship is depicted in Christian artistic tradition.

*Seeing the Word* is both a daunting and a profoundly reassuring book. Bockmuehl is a scholar of vast learning, penetrating insight and acute wit, and he is not shy about lamenting the shortcomings of his academic colleagues. But his prodigious gifts are turned to the greatest of all goods, that of reaffirming the importance and viability of reading scripture in the interest of discerning the very word of God.

- **Chris Marshall, Victoria University**

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## ***Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc.***

The purposes of the Association are:

- To nurture and support the Christian faith of individuals and groups in Australia and New Zealand who identify with the Anabaptist tradition.
- To network and link individuals, churches and groups of Christians who share a common Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith.
- To provide religious services including teaching, training, pastoral care, mediation, and counsel to its members and others interested in the Anabaptist tradition.
- To provide resources and materials relating to the tradition, perspectives, and teaching of Anabaptists to both the Christian and general public.
- To convene conferences and gatherings which provide opportunity for worship, teaching, training, consultation, celebration, and prayer in the Anabaptist tradition.
- To extend the awareness of Anabaptism in Australia and New Zealand assisting individuals, churches and groups discover and express their links with the Anabaptist tradition.
- To provide an opportunity for affiliation for churches and groups who wish to be known in Australia and New Zealand as Anabaptists.

## **What is Anabaptism?**

Anabaptism is a radical Christian renewal movement that emerged in Europe during the sixteenth-century Reformation. Whilst Anabaptism was a grassroots movement with diverse expressions in its early development, its enduring legacy usually has included the following:

- Baptism upon profession of faith
- A view of the church in which membership is voluntary and members are accountable to the Bible and to each other
- A commitment to the way of peace and other teachings of Jesus as a rule for life
- Separation of church and state
- Worshipping congregations which create authentic community and reach out through vision and service

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