

# ON THE ROAD

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**Anabaptists & The Old Testament**

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(Revised Edition)

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## From The Editor



Nathan Hobby

Perhaps you can thank a university evangelical group for the theme of this issue. I've been troubled by aspects of the Old Testament for a long time, but it was seeing a poster on campus

last year that opened up the wound for me. Above a photo of human skulls (reminiscent of Cambodia's Killing Fields) was an advertisement for a Bible talk with the eye-catching headline, 'God's Genocide' - no question mark. No-one could accuse them of trying to downplay the violence in the Old Testament. Is this the sort of God I worship? Is this what it means to be a disciple of Jesus? I was disturbed; yet I'm sure in their defence, they would insist they were only saying what the Bible says.

So what are we to make of violence in the Old Testament? Anabaptists don't agree on this, but it's a conversation worth having. Americans Eric Seibert (p.21) and Philip Friesen (p.8) have both recently published books with two different approaches. Australians Jeanette Mathews (p.12) and Dave Andrews (p.24) also provide some hermeneutical strategies, while Mark Hurst (p. 14) shows the strands of enemy love through the Old Testament that Jesus drew on. John Olley (p.16) gives a welcome constructive reading of the Old Testament in his article on Ezekiel, reminding us, if we needed it, that violence isn't the only thing in the Old Testament.

This issue also carries two reviews of Stuart Murray's important new book, *The Naked Anabaptist* (p.31), a wonderful introduction to Anabaptism for countries like Australia without Mennonite churches.

The next issue will be an Australian Federal Election special; please see the back page for details. I'm also hoping to run an issue soon dedicated to the work of John Howard Yoder, including the large number of posthumous publications and the growing number of critical responses. Please let me know if you think you might have something to contribute.

Cover: Rembrandt - "Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem" (1630)

# The View From Ephesians 4

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

*Mark and Mary Hurst, AAANZ staffworkers*



The AAANZ Executive Committee met recently in Melbourne to do some dreaming and planning for the future of the association. The question came up 'What does it mean to be a member of AAANZ?'

We hear this question often enough that a serious discussion around the membership question is needed. We began the discussion during our planning days but we want to open it up to others as well.

For some the language of 'membership' evokes images of formal organisations with rules, regulations, and dues. Members have rights and privileges but also responsibilities. Infractions of the rules can result in membership being withdrawn.

For others, the question arises 'What do I get out of membership?' In our individualistic culture people want something material and tangible for their money and time invested.

From its beginning, AAANZ has been more of a 'network' than a formal organisation. Sure, we are an incorporated religious organisation but the way we have functioned has been as a social network of people sharing common values and dreams.

The AAANZ Executive Committee discussed the question 'What wording do we use if we drop the formal membership language?' There were a number of suggestions.

We were reminded that our journal is called 'On The Road' for a reason. We like the imagery of disciples journeying with Jesus on the road of our everyday lives. The disciples travelling to

Emmaus walked with Jesus and experienced exhilaration from their experience. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?" (Luke 24:32a)

So should we call AAANZ members "fellow travellers"?

It was in the breaking of bread together that the Emmaus road disciples recognised Jesus. Being at table with others is a powerful experience and image for Christians and one we celebrate often in Communion or the Lord's Supper.

Should we call AAANZ members "companions" – which comes from the Latin meaning 'with bread'?

Other New Testament passages refer to followers of Jesus as 'pilgrims' and 'sojourners' both carrying the image of someone on a journey. This is the image we are trying to capture for membership in AAANZ. We want people who are sharing the journey of being on the road with Jesus to come and join us – as companions, fellow travellers. We want to support each other on the journey, help each other find the way, and pick each other up when we falter.

What do you think? What words or images work for you? Please share your thoughts with us.

Another thing that came out of our planning/dreaming meetings was the desire to see more small groups started around both OZ and NZ to bring people together in community. We are interested in what small groups are already functioning in our network – table fellowships, house churches, Bible/book studies, support groups, etc.? Are there ways AAANZ can support your group? Are there materials that you have found helpful and would like to share with others? Again, we value your input on this.

As we walk together following Jesus on the road, let's keep talking together and sharing the highs and lows of our common journey.

# Great South Land of the Holy Spirit

## President's Report

Doug Sewell, AAANZ President



Did you know that some of the very earliest maps of Terra Australis describe the continent as La Australia del Espiritu Santo.... the southland of the Holy Spirit?

In 1605-1606, Portuguese navigator Pedro Fernandes de Queirós crossed the Pacific in search of the mysterious Terra Australis. The expedition reached the islands later called the New Hebrides, now the nation of Vanuatu. Queirós landed on a large island which he took to be part of the southern continent, and named it La Australia del Espiritu Santo. The island is still called Espiritu Santo. Here he stated his intention to establish a colony, to be called Nova Jerusalem.

Even though the Portuguese explorer got his geography wrong, his naming of the southern continent describes very well with its character. The ancient Australian land mass has a spiritual quality that is also embodied in Aboriginal myth and dreamtime. The harsh coloured landscape fascinates me as a photographer. I find the same rough forms and light in the mountainous and barren Sinai peninsular where the liberated Old Testament tribe of Israel sojourned and wrestled with their God, Yahweh.

By comparison, the newness of Aotearoa, the Maori land of the long white cloud - New Zealand - offers, like Pentecost, something fresh and invigorating in spirit. The old land and new are connected together in tension.

There are awakenings of the spirit in both Australia and New Zealand. Where the traditional magisterial church of Anglo-Irish heritage is in decline, there are Christian groups and communities finding new and

radical ways to express a home-grown identity born of dynamic spiritual groundings.

The Anabaptist tradition with its European roots may seem at first incongruous and out of place in Australia and New Zealand. Yet as a grass roots dissident movement that calls for a faith that is somewhat reckless and engaging, Anabaptism captures the naked spirit of these two great southern lands.

The AAANZ executive met recently in Melbourne to map out directions for the next two years for the Anabaptist association and our broad network. The directions acknowledge the emerging radical spirit. There will be a number of ways that we can connect and get involved.

I am very excited by the theme of the AAANZ Conference to be held in New Zealand next year. The idea of living faithfully in the midst of or on the edge of empire is at the heart of the conference. Stuart Murray of the Anabaptist Network in the United Kingdom will be coming to speak to us about the message of his new book *Naked Anabaptism: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith*—reviewed in this issue on p.31.

Don't miss coming to the conference, which is located in a beautiful valley at the southern end of the north island of New Zealand. The conference dates are Wednesday 9th to Thursday 10th February 2011. Passionfest will follow on from our conference, running from 11th to 13th February at the same location - Ngatiawa Camp, Waikanae, a rural retreat centre one hour drive north of Wellington.

Passionfest is an annual event that draws a lot of New Zealand Christian groups together. There will be a lot of synergy with the two events held back to back that will make for an incredible week of gusty discipleship down under.

I will keep you up to date with the events and registrations will soon be open online at [www.anabaptist.asn.au](http://www.anabaptist.asn.au).

# Vox Populi

## The Voice of the People on... the Old Testament

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you— and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.

- Deuteronomy 7:1-2

### How do you respond to the Canaanite genocide passages in the Old Testament like this one, where the Israelites are commanded to kill the Canaanites and take the promised land for themselves?

#### Robert Gilland

God is the potter I am the clay.

I only exist because He exists.

I cannot even begin to judge God.

I am glad he hasn't wiped me off the planet as he has every right to, as I am a very good at sinning.

My main question is why hasn't God killed everyone, I mean ,why hasn't God killed me?

I mean we are pure scum compared to Him.

From what I can tell of Heaven it is a pure place.

A place of only light and no darkness.

I am full of darkness.

So why should God want to have a relationship with me?

I mean If I was God I wouldn't.

#### Julie Brackenreg

How do I respond?

I recoil with horror.

I ask "who is this god – this stranger, this, not-Jesus, god?"

I seek to find excuses for this god –

For myself and especially for those who ask hard questions –

I have no answer.

I go to the books.

I consult "why does this god say this?"

I look for answers from the wise –

For myself and especially for those who ask hard questions –

I find no answer.

There are times I cannot understand.

I feel shamed by my lack of insight.

I cannot reconcile my heart with my head.

I cannot reconcile my head with the god my heart knows.

I retreat to a safe space with a safe god.



Detail from: Nicolas Poussin - "The Victory of Joshua over Amorites" (1624-1626)

# Ethnic Cleansing in Deuteronomy 7

## A Homily

By Phillip Friesen



- 1 When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you—
- 2 and when the LORD your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy.
- 3 Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons,
- 4 for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.
- 5 But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire.
- 6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

### - Deuteronomy 7:1-6

In the Biblical story of God and God's people, there is an ongoing conversation between God and God's people about which a number of questions need to be asked when approaching a text like this one in Deuteronomy. We will look at two. (1) In this particular passage are we reading God's side of the conversation or humankind's? Is this the final conclusion, or are we jumping in to the middle of a conversation before a conclusion has been reached? (2) What is the spiritual purpose of these instructions in their social context? To what degree does this apply to our context?

History is the story of invasions. Ethnic cleansing follows ethnic cleansing as surely as robins follow spring and snow follows winter. Animals migrate and clash

over territory, as do humans. It all belongs to the natural order that Darwin described as competition and survival of the fittest. Tony Maalouf (in *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*, Kregel 2003) describes how God preserved Ishmael in the desert for the past 4000 years in a place that no one wished to invade. Living in the world's most inhospitable environment was the only way to guarantee survival over the long term. We can see God's hand in that.

In the beginning God commanded humans to fill the earth. There were two possible ways to do this. One was by marrying the neighbor's daughter and creating another garden next to your parents' garden. That was the easy way. The other was by getting into a fight over the

water in the river and moving far away where another river could be found. Unfortunately our ancestors chose the hard way, but even when we choose the hard way, God is still involved to fulfill his own good purpose.

The issue underlying Deuteronomy 7:1-6 is concern for Israel to be holy before its Creator. The spirit-animated universe of the pagans was a toxic environment for faith in God. In that environment it was always best to appease all gods and avoid offending any of them. Even if they didn't exist, it was surely safer to assume they did and not take chances. Israel secularized the world by insisting these gods not be worshiped or acknowledged. It was a dangerous experiment, and the survival of the Israelites depended upon the new idea being right.

Moses' insistence upon a complete ethnic cleansing of the area is not the only ethically questionable problem one finds in the Old Testament. Another equally troubling example is found Ezra 9-10. Those who had married foreign wives were forced to divorce them. This is violence against the bedrock of what it means to be human according to Genesis 1 & 2, which Jesus affirmed in Matthew 19.

Did God command Ezra to do this? I see nowhere in these chapters to certify these specific orders came from God. Ezra had come back from exile and the scars of captivity were stamped on his mind. Ezra knew the first commandment and the bitter consequences of ignoring it. Doubtless Ezra had read Deuteronomy 7:3 about intermarriage, and he applied the commandment in the only way he knew, but we must remember the conversation was not over. When Ezra had finished speaking, God still had more to say. Later Malachi wrote, "I hate divorce," and the conversation moved ahead with new revelation.

Both Moses and Ezra were dealing with infection control. In our medical system, we isolate patients with certain infectious diseases from the general population. In ancient Israel the general population was infected and Israel was the only healthy group. But Israel had extremely low immunity, as for them, the old gods of nature still made a lot of sense (just as they do to repaganized westerners today). In order to deal with the infection and preserve the only healthy specimen he had, Moses ordered an evacuation of all infected specimens and complete isolation of Israel from the local inhabitants, something that never fully happened. In one case, a group of Gibeonites, who did not wish to fight with Israel (Joshua 9-10), were preserved against Moses and Joshua's intentions. God saw what Joshua did not see, and for us to see this event as divinely directed fits right in with the over-all Biblical story of grace.

At the time of the conquest, Israel was learning that God was Lord of all the earth, and not a local Deity. The land belonged to *Yahweh*, and certain obligations were owed him by anyone living on his land. *Yahweh* had a right to police his own territory, and he could send hornets (Deuteronomy 7:20), bad weather, or use any other means to dispossess renters who had not paid their rent or fulfilled other obligations to him. Frequently God

used a marauding army or rising empire to do the eviction. In the case of Israel's invasion, the one thing made clear to Israel was that they could never congratulate themselves on their own bravery and strength (Joshua 24:12), and they must devote all booty to *Yahweh* (Joshua 7). It was *Yahweh* who policed the area, and everything they found in the land belonged to *Yahweh*.

In his book, *The Scapegoat*, Rene Girard describes how that history is written by the persecutors. The scapegoats of society are inevitably left dead or deposed such that no one ever hears their story. According to Girard, the gospel story is uniquely the first story in history written from the perspective of the innocent scapegoat. This means that even much of the Old Testament is written from the perspective of the persecutors.

Girard goes on to say that Jesus uses the language of the persecutors in the parables, because that is the only language available. Applied to the passage in Deuteronomy, God also uses the resources of the system, allowing himself to be imprisoned (or shall we say incarnate) within the thought and language of the people he seeks to save. In so doing, the conversation moves onward. Understanding and speaking the same language is fundamental to effective propagation. This is lesson 1 of Missiology 101.

Despite the violent expulsion of the Canaanites, we can see God at work for justice immediately after the conquest by Joshua in the fact that as soon as Israel became complicit in persecution of its neighbors, God's blessing ceased. A seldom-noticed passage in Judges 1:30-35 tells us Israel had begun to enslave its neighbors rather than evict them. When the former slaves in Egypt had themselves become slave masters, the very next chapter describes a messenger from God who arrived to declare God's imminent departure from the scene and disengagement from Israel. They would no longer be able to count on his protection from their enemies. God was not on the side of the persecutors. The happened both in Judges and later again after Solomon when the kingdom was divided.

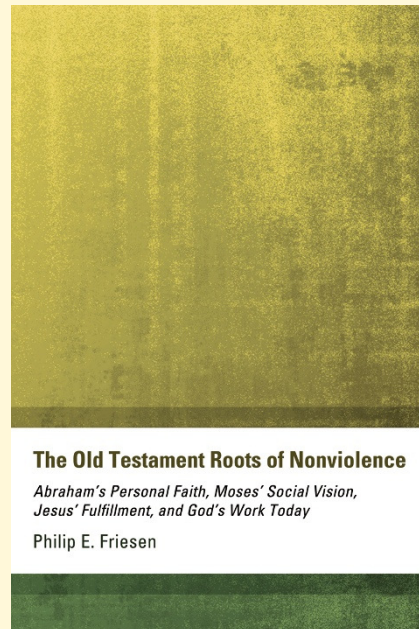
In my book, *The Old Testament Roots of Nonviolence* I have coined the term, "accommodating structures," to describe social arrangements God permitted due to unbelief in order to limit the damage humans do. The idea comes from Jesus' explanation for the divorce regulations at issue in Matthew 19. He said, "Moses wrote the divorce regulations because of your hard hearts." Ezra worked in the context of hard hearts. The relationship to God was more primary and essential than even the marriage bond. Divorce was permitted as a concession for those living in darkness, but once the Light of the World came, divorce became no longer acceptable. The conversation on this topic had been concluded.

In the story of the conquest we also see how God entered the world in Israel's behalf, even working within the limitations of their darkened minds to keep them aware of his involvement. We must remember at that time the conversation was not over. Later when Jesus forgave his enemies on the cross, the final word was spoken. From then on the weapon that conquers has been the Word from the Conqueror's mouth (see Revelation 1:16, 2:16, 19:15).

## The Old Testament Roots of Nonviolence, chapter 5

# Moses' Social Vision

By Philip Friesen



Originally published as Chapter 5 of *The Old Testament Roots of Nonviolence* (Wipf and Stock, 2010) Used by permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers.

The book is available from the publisher's website:

<http://wipfandstock.com>

## A Nation of Priests

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, *but You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation ...*  
- Exodus 19:4–6

The first time the word 'priest' occurs in Exodus is in the quotation above. Until this time the Hebrews had no priests that we are aware of. The patriarchs offered sacrifice directly to God and God spoke with them when they prayed. The Egyptians, however, had priests, and the concept was familiar.

A priest comes under the protection of the king who requires his services. After the Exodus, as a liberated people, the Hebrews now had a new government in

which *Yahweh* would be king. At Mt. Sinai Moses announced to the people of Israel that they would become a "nation of priests" (NIV). As priests, Israel would come directly under the protection of *Yahweh*. What we see here is an early manifestation of "the priesthood of all believers" in Moses' vision, with a missionary initiative through which the blessing of Abraham would begin to spread to all the families of the earth.

Following Moses' announcement, the people agreed to meet with *Yahweh*. The appointment to meet God would be in three days (Exodus 19:9–22). When God arrived, his royal train included thunder, lightning, clouds, fire, smoke, earthquake, and the sound of a trumpet, an instrument that would normally announce the arrival of royalty.

During his speech God outlined the boundaries for relationship that would govern in Israel as the condition for his protection and blessing. In the Ten Commandments there was no mention of punishment. There was only the understanding that these behaviors were the requirements of office for a nation of priests. The consequence for transgression followed the pattern of Genesis 2–3. In Genesis 2–3, the transgression had resulted in expulsion from the garden



and exclusion from the tree that gives life. At Sinai, the life-giving protection and provision of *Yahweh* was conditional upon maintaining the moral boundaries given. Only then would they remain qualified to be God's priests.

The presence of God at Mt. Sinai was too much for the Hebrews. Just as Adam and Eve had cowered in fear in Genesis 3, so the Hebrews found the presence of God too fearsome to endure. They begged Moses to go back up the mountain and talk with God in their behalf, in effect, to be a priest for them. Moses went up the mountain and returned with God's laws, detail upon detail, to be observed. It was clear the people were not ready to be a nation of priests, and so one tribe was chosen to be priests for the others. One wonders whether the rest of the Pentateuch, beginning with Exodus 21 would ever have been written had the people agreed to be God's priests and deal directly with him without an intermediary. Later Paul said that the law was added because of transgression.<sup>1</sup> Mt. Sinai is the place where it was added.

There is a somewhat universal understanding that holy men do not fight. Except in the case where the priest assumes the role of monarch, normally the priestly class is exempt from military service. As we look at the Mosaic vision further, we will discover that Moses envisioned a nation without any kind of military defense system, one that came under the protection of *Yahweh*, and whose God other nations would learn to respect. Even if Moses was not a pacifist as the word is used today, he did oppose living in an armed, military state.

## Kingship Regulations

Pacifism is uniquely a Christian idea. Centuries before Jesus, the Greeks and Romans discussed the ethics of war in their writings. Nothing like nonresistance was ever seriously presented for consideration.<sup>2</sup> Still, there is a parallel debate in the Old Testament between advocates of monarchy and those who opposed it. Robert Gnuse describes this ongoing Old Testament critique of monarchy as follows: "The critique of kings, especially by the prophets and the Deuteronomistic historians in ancient Israel, was the most strident we can find in the ancient world, and modern biblical scholars and theologians would recognize that. What we might not sense is how pervasive that critique could be throughout the biblical text. Even the portrayal of the ideal king or messiah who would come someday is still a criticism of the existing institution of kingship in that age."<sup>3</sup>

The establishment of monarchy in Israel was initiated during Samuel's time due to an emergency of national

defense. Samuel was clearly opposed to monarchy, but the elders demanded a king in order to prepare for war. The irony was that the continued failure of spiritual leadership, first under the priest, Eli, and his sons, and then under Samuel's sons, had precipitated the crises (1 Samuel 2:11–4:22 & 8:1–22). The spiritual leaders were not trustworthy; therefore God's help could not be counted on, and the people felt they must defend themselves.

Those who opposed monarchy were not opposed to war necessarily, but they believed that to establish and maintain a standing army was not desirable or necessary if God were king. They could claim the authority of Moses, and the kingship ideals summarized in Deuteronomy 17 would have been a solid basis for their opposition to monarchy.

When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me," you may indeed set over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community. Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the Lord has said to you, "You must never return that way again." And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself. When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel (Deuteronomy 17:14–20).

The practical effects of this legislation would be as follows:

1. The king was not to engage in the international weapons trade by buying horses from Egypt.
2. The king was not to marry foreign princesses, but rather keep his attention on his God-given work and not be distracted by a harem. The effect diplomatically of this regulation, however, would be to deprive him of the most powerful chattel that a diplomat had for keeping peace. A diplomatic marriage was the surest guarantee of secure borders and peaceful trade with one's neighbors. (In John the Baptist's time,

King Herod dumped the daughter of King Aretas of Arabia in favor of Herodias' mother, the wife of his brother, Phillip, and the result was war.<sup>4</sup>

3. The king was not to collect taxes to increase his own wealth. This regulation combined with the ban on the weapons trade quite effectively eliminated the possibility of maintaining a standing army.

4. The king was to regularly study the Book of the Law so as to be an obedience vassal of his Sovereign who ruled from the heavens. By implication, if the king needed help in terms of either the economy or the national defense, he should first of all call upon God, and not make entangling military alliances with rival governments.<sup>5</sup>

Samuel's concession speech (1 Samuel 8:10–13) reflects the ideas found in the Deuteronomy passage. Later during the monarchy, the issue of foreign wives and mutual defense treaties was a point of contention between prophet and king in the case of Elijah (1 Kings 16:29–22:40), and also of Isaiah.<sup>6</sup> (Isaiah 7, 2 Chronicles 28:16ff, and 2 Kings 16:1–20).

Scholars recognize Deuteronomy to have been written late, at the time of Josiah or later; however, that fact does not prove their sources were not genuinely from Moses. It is not impossible that when the book of the law was discovered in the temple during the time of Josiah, that it contained all kinds of antimonarchical materials. In fact, it is likely that such materials would be hidden in the darkest corner of the temple away from eyes of the king.<sup>7</sup> Steven Schweitzer has demonstrated that the two poems in Deuteronomy 32–33 have most likely come from much earlier sources than the actual writing of the Deuteronomistic history, and may have formed the basis for it.<sup>8</sup> I take the position that Deuteronomy is genuinely from Mosaic sources and suggest the editors kept the ancient poetry unedited as a fitting conclusion to their work.

## Warfare in Israel

In Deuteronomy 1, Moses told the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea at the border of Canaan, "Have no dread or fear of them (the formidable Anakim of Canaan). The Lord your God who goes before you, is the one who will fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you traveled until you reached this place (Deut. 1:29–31)."

How does one carry a child? Does one place a knife in the child's hands for self-defense? And how much fighting did the Hebrews do in Egypt? The obvious answers are No and None. The news of Pharaoh's

disaster would have reached Canaan ahead of the Israelites. The inhabitants would have taken any small natural disaster as a sign their fate would quickly be the same as the Egyptians. Something as militarily insignificant as a large swarm of hornets (see Exodus 23:28 and Deuteronomy 7:20) could start the panic so the inhabitants would promptly flee.

Just as Abraham had walked into the land; so Israel again could walk into the land and live there. If we consider the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 to be the first installment of the great commission, then it follows that as soon as the initial panic was over, and Israel had a place to live, the refugees could have come back to learn the ways of the God of Israel, once the panic had subsided. This reasonable suggestion follows from Moses' vision to create a nation of priests rather than a warrior state.

Unfortunately, in contrast to Abraham, his descendants lacked the necessary trust in *Yahweh*. They had crossed the Red Sea under duress, with Pharaoh's army closing in. Now at the border of Canaan without the threat of violence behind them, the fear of violence ahead kept them from the blessing of God. Forty years later when they crossed the Jordan River into the land, the evangelistic opportunity had passed, and the Hebrews had no idea what blessings they had missed. Now they had to fight their way in.

It is possible the Hebrews really didn't do so much damage when they entered the land, as it would appear. Surely the Hebrews, like everyone else, were sometimes given to bragging, but Joshua brought them back to reality in his farewell address in the story reported in Joshua 24:12. "I [the Lord] sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove out before you the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or your bow." It was still the Lord's doing. Millard Lind has written about Joshua after the defeat of Jabin and his allies in Joshua 11, "Israel was militarily inferior to the enemy . . . Joshua's hamstringing the horses and burning the chariots suggest that inferiority was not only forced upon Israel, but was abetted by deliberate religious choice."<sup>9</sup> This conforms to what we read in Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

Still, many will object to the ethnic cleansing ordered by Moses in Numbers 33:52 or the genocide commanded by Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:3. First one needs to recognize that during this early period, Israel typically fought as a band of shepherds and farmers using the tools of their trade against armies better equipped than they were, and room needs to be allowed for some rhetoric of encouragement by those in leadership who sent the peasants into battle. Secondly, these murderous commands were given always after a period of disobedience and unbelief. When hearts are hard in unbelief, then violent structures of coercion come into play, but God still may take an active role

in determining the outcomes. Thirdly, there were no documents of human rights, rules of war, and no just war theories at that time. All these should be seen as effects of the gospel yeast at work in the loaf of humanity since Jesus came. What was normative then cannot be used as a model for our behavior now, even if a Divine command was given.

## Conclusion

The kernel of a pacifist idea that we find in the Mosaic tradition appears to be an ethic that says something like this: It's okay to go to war, but it's not okay to maintain an army, to stockpile weapons, or to take any kind of threatening posture towards people around you. If you really have to fight, cry out to God and he will send a savior, but you must trust him rather than depend upon the usual, accepted means of self-defense. *A nation of priests cannot be an armed camp and at the same time represent God to the other nations.*

Abraham was called to bless the nations in Genesis 12. Israel's task was to provide light for the nations as Isaiah later wrote (Isaiah 49:6, 51:4 60:3). Jesus told his followers that they would be his light in Matthew 5:16. When enemies fear our army, but not our God, the light has a basket covering it (Matthew 5:15). The effect of Moses' kingship regulations was to outlaw the regular standing army so that when the need arose, God's power could be displayed instead.

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<sup>1</sup>Galatians 3:19. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator.

<sup>2</sup>See Reichberg, *The Ethics of War, Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Oxford: Blackwell 1988.

<sup>3</sup>Gnuse, 147.

<sup>4</sup>Colin Duriez, 207.

<sup>5</sup>J. A. Thompson, "Deuteronomy", 206. "That a copy of the covenant law should be in the hand of the king has an interesting parallel in the secular suzerainty treaties of the ancient Near East. A duplicate of the treaty was provided for the vassal king and was to be read in public periodically. The suzerain also kept a copy which he deposited in the sanctuary of his god. In a similar way Israel's king was required to have a copy of *Yahweh's* covenant stipulations ... In the only detailed description of a coronation ceremony in the Old Testament, the boy king Joash was crowned and presented with 'the testimony' (*edut*) i.e. the covenant stipulations" (2 Kings 11:12).

<sup>6</sup>Isaiah does not mention foreign wives in his critique, but he firmly opposes Ahaz' defense arrangement with the Assyrian Empire.

<sup>7</sup>W. D. Monroe, M.A., "Must We Relegate Deuteronomy to the Reign of Josiah?" 3–21.

<sup>8</sup>Steven Schweitzer, "Deuteronomy 32 and 33 as Proto-Deuteronomic Texts," 79–98.

<sup>9</sup>*Yahweh Is a Warrior*, chapter 4, esp. p 87.

# What Are We to Make of Violence in the Book of Habakkuk?

By Jeanette Mathews



Donatello - "Habakkuk"

Over the past two and a half years I have been working on a PhD thesis studying the book of Habakkuk. It is an intriguing book with its many different moods, perspectives and literary genres. In its three short chapters can be found prayers including complaints, laments and praise, prophetic oracles, taunts and woes, a call to worship midway through the book and a theophany (an appearance of God) in the pattern of a victory hymn. In addition, there are allusions to psalms and wisdom material. The prophet Habakkuk fluctuates between despair and faith, uttering some of the most audacious complaints against his God from the depths of his anguish, but also words that have been treasured by Paul, Luther and Christians down through the ages (see Habakkuk 2:4 and Habakkuk 3:17-18 – familiar

words indeed).

I love the Old Testament but like many others I am troubled by the violent images and commandments associated with Israel's God. Habakkuk is one of those troubling books where Yahweh is pictured as a conquering warrior, marching through the land wielding his weapons and wreaking havoc on the natural world as well as the enemy nations of his own people. This image comes in the third chapter, and contrasts with a similar image in the first chapter of the violent Chaldean forces personified by their king "*walking across expanses of earth to possess dwelling places not his own*" (Habakkuk 1:6, my translation). Is it then just a show of power? "My might is bigger than your might."

The work that I have been doing with Habbakuk is reading it through the lens of performance theory. In simple terms, I have been reading the book of Habakkuk as a script, alert to features of performance such as actor, audience and setting. This is a book that begins and ends in crisis. The opening words of the prophet (Habakkuk 1.2-4) suggest a situation of turmoil where injustice reigns and no order is kept, giving rise to a bitter complaint. The closing prayer – Habakkuk 3.16-19 – describes a situation of calamity where all sources of fertility have dried up, either due to the invading army or to natural causes.

It is clear that for much of the book the crisis is of a military nature. The description of the army's approach (Habakkuk 1.5-11), the prophet's reference to being "on guard" at the "siegeworks" (Habakkuk 2.1), mention of plunder (Habakkuk 2.7-8), violence (Habakkuk 2.8-9, 17) and bloodshed (Habakkuk 2.8, 12, 17) in the woe oracles and the mention of an imminent invasion in the closing scene (Habakkuk 3.16) all evoke a situation of warfare in which the prophet's community is in a vulnerable position. As already stated, military imagery is also used in the theophanic description of Yahweh as a warrior with weapons and chariot (Habakkuk 3.3-15). Are we therefore to understand the book of Habakkuk's message as the idea that violence is to be met with a greater violence, personified in the Warrior God?

As I have thought about this question I have come up with three features in the book of Habakkuk that help question this military setting as the normative and acceptable site for this particular revelation.

First, the prophet is described twice in an elevated status – after his complaints he sets himself on siegeworks to keep watch (Habakkuk 2:1) and at the end of the book he claims to be on high places (Habakkuk 3:19). This raised position which can be understood literally and figuratively puts him on a par with Yahweh and gives both his statements of complaint *and* his confessions of faithful trust an equal significance to triumphalist portraits of conquering warriors. Honestly expressed pain, bewilderment and quiet conviction are intended to be heard despite the sound and light shows of the forceful destructiveness of the invading army on the one hand and the thundering presence of Yahweh on the other.

Second, the five woe oracles of Habakkuk 2:6-19 describe a paradoxical reversal of fortune for the aggressor, indicating that the seeds of destruction are contained within the system of tyranny. The Chaldean king is taunted by his victims: "*Shall not everyone taunt such people and, with mocking riddles say about them, 'Woe to you'*" (Habakkuk 2:6) but the description of his downfall is presented as a consequence of his own actions rather than as the result of a direct attack by Yahweh.

The third nuance preventing this performance's domination by military triumphalism is the observation that natural and military imagery are merged in the theophany. The realm of human experience is explored to find appropriate descriptors for the presence of Yahweh, so that his blinding presence is akin to looking into the sun's light (Habakkuk 3:4), thunderstorms become thundering horse-drawn chariots (Habakkuk 3:8, 15) and lightning shafts become spears (Habakkuk 3:11). Yahweh's presence, although described in words borrowed from warfare, is actually more pervasive than an invading army because it encompasses the entire natural world.

Another well known verse from the book of Habakkuk comes at the end of Chapter 2: "*But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him*" (verse 20, NRSV). At this point in the book the mood changes from complaint and taunt to prayer and worship. In many ways it is the high point of the book, suggesting that despite the overall setting of crisis and the pervading military imagery, the vision of Yahweh in his temple of holiness is the central and dominant vision. When Yahweh is in his place, all human words, movement and power are ultimately silenced before him. The script continues in prayer, vision and words of faith, so silence is not the only response that is needed, but it does allow pause for thought and reflection.

The character of God is portrayed in several ways in the book of Habakkuk: a silent God who seems to ignore human misery, a decisive God manipulating nations and world events, a remote God whose holiness inspires awe and worship, a God on the move shaking the foundations of the earth, a Warrior God who comes to save his people, a God who tenderly cares for individuals. As soon as one characteristic is introduced another takes its place. The prophet shows that he is willing to adapt to respond to each of these manifestations, especially in several references to "waiting" (Habakkuk 2:1, 2:3, 3:16) but I think it is significant that the script ends in movement (*he makes me walk*, Habakkuk 3.19, my translation). Faith is active. After this is a postscript inviting re-enactment in song.

For me, a preliminary response to the problem of violence in the Old Testament is to recognise such passages as one amongst many messages, all of which have been preserved as equally significant. Struggling with the meaning of such passages in our own situation is an example of active faith. The book of Habakkuk, on a small scale, also offers a multiplication of moods, genres and perspectives, reminding the reader that faithfulness cannot be static, but involves continual reflection and re-enactment.

# Enemy Love

By Mark Hurst



“God is a god who loves enemies and wants us to do the same.” We often tell our students this when we teach about peace and reconciliation. We believe this is the biblical message of good news that Jesus taught and modelled while on earth.

Where did Jesus get this idea? From what Christians often call the Old Testament. There is a tradition of enemy love that threads its way through the Old Testament and is then knitted together by Jesus. In this article, I want to look at some of those threads.

## Thread Number One – Genesis 9: 12-17

*God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”*

We were at a conference a few years ago where a number of scholarly papers were being presented. One was about the flood narrative in Genesis. In the middle of the presenter’s talk she said ‘the Hebrew word for bow (*qeset*) is also the word for a battle bow.’ And then she continued on with her presentation.

For me, this was one of those rare moments of revelation. I’ve heard the story of the flood all my life, starting with early accounts in my childhood Sunday School classes. I always heard ‘rainbow’ when the story was told or read. I never heard ‘bow’, as in

‘bow and arrow’.

What God was doing by hanging God’s bow in the clouds was disarming Godself. This was an act of disarmament right in the beginning of the biblical story. God refuses to take up this weapon of war against creation even when humanity turns to evil rather than to God – even when we become God’s enemies. Thus, every time we see a bow in the sky, we can remember God’s peace agreement between God and the earth.

## Thread Number Two - 2 Kings 6:14-23 (English Standard Version)

*The king of Syria sent horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night and surrounded the city.*

*When the servant of Elisha rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, “Please strike this people with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha. And Elisha said to them, “This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.” And he led them to Samaria.*

*As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, “O LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.” So the LORD opened their eyes and they saw, and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. As soon as the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, “My father, shall I strike them down? Shall I strike them down?” He answered, “You shall not strike them*

*down. Would you strike down those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." So he prepared for them a great feast, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel.*

In this story told in 2 Kings 6, Elisha keeps warning the king of Israel about the king of Aram (Syria) and where he is planning to attack. The king of Aram thinks there is a spy in their midst. He is told about Elisha and where he is and sends a whole army after him. The passage above tells the story.

Elisha captures the enemy Syrian army and rather than kill them all, like the king wants, he treats them to a feast and sends them on their way home. The story ends with this note: *'And the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel.'*

Elisha's creativity shines through in his refusal to accept the violent option so often chosen by kings. It is testament to a third way between using violence and doing nothing and leads to our next thread.

### **Thread Number Three - Proverbs 25:21-22**

*"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."*

Elisha illustrated this response in 2 Kings 6. He chose good over evil; enemy love over enemy hate. The Apostle Paul uses this Proverbs passage in his instructions to the Romans (12:17-21).

What is all of this 'coals on the head' stuff? Scholars have numerous answers but the one that makes sense to me is this. In Bible times a person needed to keep his hearth fire going all the time in order to ensure fire for cooking and warmth. If it went out, he had to go to a neighbour for some live coals of fire. These he would carry on his head in a container, oriental fashion, back to his home. The person who would give him some live coals would be meeting his desperate need and showing him an outstanding kindness. If he would heap the container with coals, the man would be sure of getting some home still burning. The one injured would be returning kindness for injury.

### **Thread Number Four – Jeremiah 29:1-7**

*These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent*

*to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*

The Jews were in a foreign land, enemy land. Read Psalm 137 to see how devastated they were. "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

Their local prophets were telling them that they would not be there for long. God would not do that to them. But Jeremiah had a different word from the Lord. Settle in, you are going to be there for a while. But even stranger was what he told them to do. *'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.'* The word translated 'welfare' is *shalom*. The rich Hebrew word means peace, wholeness, well-being, and welfare. Jeremiah was telling the Jews to pray for their enemies – the Babylonians – for the Jewish welfare (peace, security, etc.) is all wrapped up with their enemies' welfare. Victims and offenders need each other to experience *shalom*.

### **Thread Number Five - Jonah**

We often read the story of Jonah either as a big fish story or the story of a reluctant missionary. But at the heart of the story is *"a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing"* (4:2). This is a God who loves enemies – even the hated people of Nineveh. And Jonah does not like that! That is why he fled and why he wants to die in chapter four. He would rather die than see God forgive the hated enemy.

But Jonah knew what God was like. He could not escape it and the story named after him stands as a testimony to this loving, forgiving God.

Jesus knew about this enemy-loving God as well. He captured these threads and others and told his followers "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45). This Father God loves liberally and indiscriminately by sending rain and sunshine on the good and the evil. Not in a flood to destroy, but in proper amounts to nurture and sustain creation. That is how we are to love others – including our enemies.

# Visions of God

## Worship in Times of Crisis and Compromise

By John Olley



*Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld - "The Glory of God" (1851-60)*

Ezekiel and Revelation stand out in Scripture with their extensive visions of God. Through the centuries Revelation has been tapped for liturgical material, often divorced from its literary and social context, while Ezekiel has been almost absent. Perhaps this is understandable. Many will sympathise with our family experience around twenty five years ago: we began to read Ezekiel in family devotions but before long the cry was, 'Do we have to continue?' Although my teaching area has been the whole Old Testament I gave much attention to Isaiah and Jeremiah but barely touched Ezekiel. Belatedly, in the nineties I decided to look more closely at Ezekiel and then came an invitation to write a major commentary on Ezekiel. The process has changed me, including fresh awareness of the goal and outworking of worship!<sup>1</sup>

I became aware of strong links between Revelation and Ezekiel. Both visions are given to individuals in exile, in times of uncertainty and crisis, and the influence of Ezekiel permeates both content and structure of Revelation.<sup>2</sup> Both confront popular dominant images of power, wealth and success in times of conflict and compromise: their language and descriptions match their cultural contexts but the issues are perennial. Both together can help us reflect on our own experiences and practices of worship in relationship to daily trust and obedience in a complex world. As John found language and patterns from Ezekiel, adapting to his own cultural setting, so there is encouragement for current use of both books, seeking to contextualise in our own settings, but still like John, in light of the Lamb who was slain and now reigns.



## Visions and Cultural Imagery

Nothing could seem further from current weekly worship experiences than the opening vision of Ezekiel (ch. 1)! The description of the indescribable is full of 'looked (something) like', 'the appearance', with sounds 'like', culminating in 'the appearance of the likeness of'. Many will agree with Calvin, 'If anyone asks whether the vision is lucid, I confess its obscurity, and that I can scarcely understand it', but he continues, 'yet into what God has set before us, it is not only lawful and useful but necessary to enquire.'<sup>3</sup> Some have found in it a source for mystical ascension into the presence of God,<sup>4</sup> although in Ezekiel's case 'the glory of the LORD' comes down where he is 'among the exiles'. That location is the first unexpected element which may be passed over today with our long experience of worshipping God 'where we are', shaped by words such as those of Jesus to the woman by the well (John 4:21-24). The Kebar River was in an 'unclean land' (Amos 7:17); the people were there as a consequence of their moral impurity, violent injustice and idolatrous worship and it was a place of despair. One met God in the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 42; Isa. 6:1), not in exile. Wright's contemporary reflection is apt:

There are times when our doctrinal conviction of God's omnipresence needs to become an experienced reality again. Whether through geographical distance, like Ezekiel's, or through more spiritual or emotional alienation, the experience of exile from the presence of God can be dark and terrible. ... We can certainly pray for the reassurance of the touch of his hand reminding us that God is there, even there.<sup>5</sup>

Was Ezekiel's experience in exile one that facilitated John's being 'in the Spirit' on Patmos (Rev. 1:10)? I well remember in 1989 at Lausanne II in Manila the testimony of a Chinese pastor imprisoned in the Cultural Revolution and given the task of cleaning the cesspool: 'That was where I had most freedom to shout aloud my praise to God!'

Before any message is given to Ezekiel, before any prophetic action, he 'sees'. The vision of God shaped his ministry. It opens with a 'windstorm' accompanied by 'flashing lightning' and 'brilliant light'. Jerusalem may be threatened by the armies of Babylon and would soon be destroyed, but the immensity of the windstorm is an awesome sign that the God of the exodus (Exod 19:16-19; 24:10; Hab 3:3-7) is not threatened. Further, much of the following imagery can be identified with ancient Near Eastern

iconography, including that used to awe visitors to Assyrian palaces.<sup>6</sup> Such imagery sought to reinforce the legitimacy of a ruler, communicating power, status and prestige. Ezekiel's description of what the vision was 'like' uses culturally available and communicable imagery, not to domesticate and tame God, but to challenge popular perceptions of power and success.

In Revelation again images of power, honour and prestige are used to subvert the all-embracing symbols of Roman might and wealth. The context of Christians addressed by Revelation is much discussed, but included are the all-pervading presence in Asia Minor of the imperial cult, with commercial implications, and pressures for religious compromise, along with persecution.<sup>7</sup> The portrayal of wealth is dominant throughout the book, culminating in the contrast between the wealth of Babylon (cipher for Rome) and that of the new Jerusalem. Strikingly in the lament over the fall of 'Babylon' (Rev. 18) the language does not come from the oracles against Babylon in Isaiah or Jeremiah (which focus on military might, with resultant prosperity) but from oracles against Tyre (a commercial power) in Ezekiel 26-28. This is directly relevant for worshippers in consumer societies!

Pertinent for contemporary worship is Odell's summary and reflection on Ezekiel 1:

Though Ezekiel's vision may well have been a suprarational experience of divine transcendence, the raw materials for the vision are the cultural icons and political rhetoric of the Assyrian empire, which had exerted control over Israel and Judah for centuries.... Ezekiel's appropriation is radically subversive... [he] asserts that the only effective power in the lives of the people of Israel is Yahweh...

In today's world of constitutional democracies, one searches in vain for a metaphor that approaches Ezekiel's in its conveyance of divine universal order. In our contemporary ways of speaking about God, no other metaphor [than that of sovereign] has the potential to still the many voices that clamor for our allegiance, or to rebuke the powers that sabotage our dignity.<sup>8</sup>

Dominant powers, whether political, military, economic or cultural (commonly intertwined), provide all-embracing and permeating images and language of success and power, made even more pervasive with twenty-first century media. There is always the temptation to fall in line with such, whether it be like King Ahaz in the eighth century BC copying Assyrian altars (2 Kings 16:10-14), the later Christian adopting of symbols of imperial power in

the Constantinian era or the material and economic status symbols of much of the modern West. In all of these comes the temptation for faith to be put at the service of the dominant power, or for symbols to point to the church and its leaders rather than to God.

The imagery of the visions of Ezekiel and John provide a stimulus to examine the adequacy of divine images in contemporary worship and to explore ways in which the 'raw materials' of current 'cultural icons and political rhetoric' (all part of our language) may be used in a way that is 'radically subversive' in the contexts of our congregations, pointing to the One who alone is sovereign and present. The contrast between the vision of God's glory and the attitudes and views of the exiles or of those still in Jerusalem could not have been greater, but it was the vision of God and what followed that was to be a key factor in changing those attitudes! Drastic situations required a vision of God's glory, and a later vision of 'God's glory displayed in the face of Christ' (2 Cor 4:6) is still having world-changing results. In the context of a militaristic, might-honouring society John saw 'a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain' but who 'triumphs, along with his 'called, chosen and faithful followers' (Rev 5:6; 17:14). The visions of Ezekiel and John are examples of culturally relevant language that critiques that same culture, giving glory alone to God

## God First, Then Response

The messages of Ezekiel and John began with a divine vision, and regrettably it is not trite to say that is where true worship *begins*, seeing God (now known to be Father, Son and Spirit). In a recent article Mark Galli commented:

Once upon a time, there was a man who said to himself, "I think, therefore I am." It was a revolutionary statement, because up to that time, people didn't think this was the way to begin. "In the beginning, God. ..." Yes. "In the beginning was the Word. ..." Yes. But now, for the first time, someone was saying, "In the beginning, I..."<sup>9</sup>

He reflects on consequences and varying Christian responses (read the article!), but the quote highlights the cultural shift. We live in a society where 'I determine 'what kind of God I believe in (if any) – if it's relevant to me' and where 'thus says the Lord' is perceived as arrogance or 'that's just your view'. Worship is then related to 'meeting my needs'. While today's society focuses more on the individual, it could also be said that at the times of Ezekiel and John, people also followed the religious practices they believed would give success. The biblical answer is a

revelation of the living God, above all in Christ. The challenge for any worship service becomes, what images of God are being presented? Are they captive to cultural values or have we been able to 'take every thought captive to obey Christ' (2 Cor. 10:4)?

Ezekiel's response was, 'I fell on my face' (Ezek. 1:28), an act of submission and worship common in many cultures. Immediately he is told to 'stand up' and is raised by the Spirit to hear God speak to him (2:1; also 3:24; 43:5). His being is determined by his relationship with God: God has appeared to him and he responds and is given a task. Recently Rosner suggested that "the Enlightenment dictum of 'I think, therefore I am,'... might be revised to, 'I am known, therefore I am.'"<sup>10</sup> John's response likewise was to 'fall at his feet as though dead' and immediately he is told. 'Don't be afraid... write...' (Rev 1:17-19). The juxtaposition of awareness of the living God's presence, submissive worship, and being accepted and commissioned with a message provides a pattern readily transposable to worship contexts in general.

## 'Open My Eyes'

The God who 'is seen' is also the One who 'sees'. Ezekiel's vision narrative opens with 'I looked, and I saw' (1:6), but

this is a vision that likewise *sees* (cf. Ps. 11:4), Not only the wheels but the living creatures themselves are replete with eyes (1:18, 10, 12) ... But, of course, that which is seen ("the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord") sees much more clearly than does the seer (the prophet and, in turn, the reader) who beholds. Indeed that which is seen sees all.... [The description] concludes with an awareness that it is not Ezekiel who beholds the vision so much as it is the vision that beholds him.<sup>11</sup>

Lieb focuses this movement in arguing that the opening 'visions of God' (Ezek. 1:1; a heading for the whole book) is also 'visions *by* God'.<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel is enabled to 'see' what God makes known to him, especially what is going on in the city of Jerusalem and the temple and what will go on with the new temple and city whose location will be in the middle of the land. Ezekiel is commissioned to communicate what God shows him, initially by speech, but now through the book before us. John too obeyed the command to 'write'. Today we can thus see what God sees and what God will do.

Ezekiel is shown idolatrous worship in the city and temple, with lack of integrity in worship mirrored in violence and widespread injustice – and prophets who

proclaim 'peace' (e.g., 7:20; 8:3, 10-16; 11:6; 13:10). Exposed are the false hopes of those who felt secure (7:19-27; 11:2-4, 14-15). A later vision takes Ezekiel to see the horrific behaviour of the leaders in the temple (chs. 8-9) and then to see God's glory leaving the temple (chs. 10-11). God's glory cannot be bound even to his own 'temple/palace' – liturgy and building are no guarantee!

There is more however than exposure of evil, for the God whose name has been 'profaned among the nations' by Israel's actions and consequent exile is going to act to 'hallow my name' so that 'the nations will know I am the LORD' (36:22-23).<sup>13</sup> He will bring his people back from exile and cleanse with 'a new spirit' (36:24-38). God's glory' reappears in 39:21, foreshadowing its return to the new temple and land in ch. 43. The future for Israel is linked with the honour of God's name among the nations. Worship leads into a continuing openness to hearing God's word, seeing more of God's purposes for his people and all nations, making him known.

This is a bold, seemingly unrealistic vision! Ezekiel is one of a devastated minority group in exile. Babylon's forces have with apparent impunity destroyed 'the city of God' (Pss 46, 48, 87) and its temple, the 'footstool' of Yahweh's throne (Ps. 99:1-5; 132:7). His vision of God however enables him to see the greater reality: 'God's glory' is not limited; he has acted in judgment and will act for the sake of his name among the nations.

John likewise is first shown the varying states of 'seven churches' and God's plans for them before he is told to 'come up' to 'the throne in heaven' (Rev. 4:1-2). He is given

a God's-eye view of reality. It includes the world we can see with the eyes in our head (people and creatures), but also the world we can see only with the eyes of faith (the angelic hosts)... This is a truly cosmic worldview, with a radically transforming perspective for someone living in a world where everybody saw Rome as the centre of the known world and the Roman emperor as the one seated on the throne of imperial power and government.<sup>14</sup>

He sees 'the Lamb who was slain': it is from the perspective of the cross that he, and we, 'can only make sense of the world and all the terrible events that fill its history, past, present and yet to come'.<sup>15</sup> It is then that John is shown 'constant realities in human history... conquest, war, famine and disease in multiple forms' but the multiple horsemen 'are not out of control.... *That same Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, reigns over the forces of evil that are loose in the*

*world, in the same way as he reigned from the cross. Nothing can happen in human history... which [God] cannot weave into the outworking of his universal purpose of redeeming love for the whole creation.*'<sup>16</sup>

The oft-used hymns of Revelation are found within this context: their praise of God and of the Lamb and their joyous linking of earthly with heavenly worship is in the midst of experiences of turmoil and pressures to conform, with competing ideologies and icons. They do not belong in some 'spiritual' realm, an escape from 'reality', but rather they are affirmations of what is an integral part of everyday life. They are to evoke the vision that encourages the 'seven churches' in responding to their specific messages. Eyes are opened to see. The message Ezekiel proclaims is that people can say 'we know that he is Yahweh' only when they give sole covenantal allegiance worshipping Yahweh alone and following his laws relating to both worship and life in society.

Where God is leading history is not left without a picture providing guidance for the future, again with culturally appropriate images. Both Ezekiel and John see visions that relativise and critique any picture of immediate gratification and honour. The new temple and land of Ezekiel 40-48 is where 'God's glory' returns and resides. The size and architecture are powerful images of welcome and openness, while the violence and oppression of the past by rulers and leaders, with unjust exercise of power in commerce and business transactions, are to be no more (Ezek. 45:7-12). Rather than displaying wealth gained by despoiling others at the cost of 'human beings' (Rev. 18: 1-13), John's vision of the bejeweled new Jerusalem (21:11, 18-21) incorporates from Ezekiel's the 'river of life', nourishing the trees whose leaves 'are for the healing of the nations' (Rev. 22:1-2; cf. Ezek. 47:1-12). In both there is permanent relationship: 'They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God' (Rev. 21:3; cf. Ezek. 37:23, 27).

A vision of God that transcends and critiques human imitations, that shows his sovereignty despite what is seen by physical eyes, that opens eyes to see community life as God sees, exposing false worship and oppressive injustice, that provides a vision of the future encouraging perseverance in faithfulness, even in times of darkness and pressures to cultural conformity – both Ezekiel and John had the privilege of such. That their vision is written calls for communication to the present.

How is this to be worked out in worship of God today? Here are my suggested questions for a checklist:

- In what ways does our worship draw people to the living God and to the Lamb? What language and images are used? How are they biblically informed and culturally relevant? What current culturally dominant images of power and success require radically subverting?
- How does the content of worship help worshippers to have a God's-eye view of everyday life, local and global, with its turmoil and pressures, exposing idolatries and injustices?
- How is worship to provide a vision of a reality that is more than and yet intimately connected with the world of sight and sense and the

'now'? And that also transforms understanding and behaviour?

- How may use of the great hymns of Revelation 4-5 inform the common experiences of Revelation 5-7 and the varied church situations of Revelation 2-3?
- Where in worship is there openness to the renewing, cleansing work of the Spirit that leads to the name of God being hallowed amongst the nations, so answering the prayer, 'Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come'?
- Where is there a vision of the future that is not escapist but encourages present following the way of Christ?

As God in his grace enables us by his Word and Spirit to 'see' him, above all in Christ, may we be enabled to 'see' the world around differently and to move ahead to the certain, but 'imaged', future.

<sup>1</sup>Some of the Ezekiel material here is adapted from a larger article, "'Worship and the Presence of God: Seeing with Ezekiel'", in *In Praise of Worship: An Exploration of Text and Practice*, ed. M. Parsons and D. Cohen (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010). See also "'Hallowed be your name': does Ezekiel speak to Essendon, Eastwood and East Fremantle?", *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies* 35 (Sept 2006): 37-43.

<sup>2</sup>B. Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004) after reviewing previous studies argues for the use of at least 135 verses. The structure has also been influenced, allusions following Ezekiel's order; see I. K. Boxall, 'Exile, Prophet, Visionary: Ezekiel's Influence on the Book of Revelation', in *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence*, ed. H. J. de Jonge and J. Tromp (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 149-64.

<sup>3</sup>*Commentary on Ezekiel*, Lecture 2, <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom22.v.v.html>> (accessed 14 May 2010).

<sup>4</sup>*Merkabah* ('Chariot') mysticism, from the second century BC name given to the vision in Sirach 49:8 and Ezek. 43:3 LXX.

<sup>5</sup>C. J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 45.

<sup>6</sup>L. C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 1-45, espec. 27-37, and M. S. Odell, *Ezekiel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 14-51, espec. 23-31, include sketches and diagrams of relevant ancient Near Eastern iconography and representational art.

<sup>7</sup>In addition to commentaries, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'Revelation, Book of', in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997), 1025-38; J. N. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); and R. M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven. The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup>Odell, *Ezekiel*, 34-37.

<sup>9</sup>M. Galli, "'The Whisper of Grace'", *Christianity Today* <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/aprilweb-only/27.41.0.html>> (accessed 14 May 2010).

<sup>10</sup>B. Rosner, "'Known by God': The Meaning and Value of a Neglected Biblical Concept", *Tyndale Bulletin* 59, 2 (2008):227.

<sup>11</sup>M. Lieb, *The Visionary Mode: Biblical Prophecy, Hermeneutics, and Cultural Change* (Ithaca: NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 39.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>13</sup>See further in "'Hallowed be your name'" (n. 1).

<sup>14</sup>C. J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 64, in his chapter, 'The Defeat of Evil'.

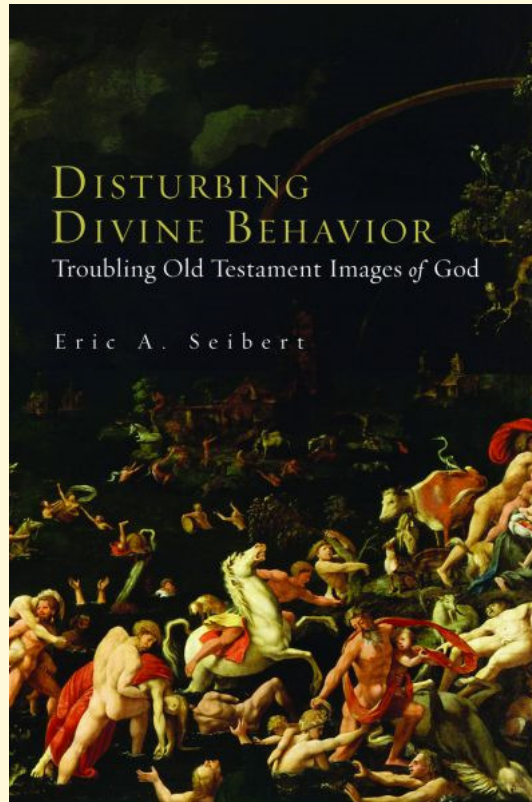
<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 66-68; emphasis original.

# God Behaving Badly?

A review article

By Nathan Hobby



## **Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God**

Eric Seibert (Fortress Press, 2009)

In this book, Eric Seibert tackles head-on a question which has long been in my mind: what are we to do with the troubling Old Testament images of God? The ones where, for example, God orders the Israelites to commit genocide, killing all the men, women and children of a town?

Seibert frames the question like an evangelical, worried about the authority of scripture and not willing to lightly call the Old Testament into question. However, many evangelicals would disown him. Instead of the standard evangelical approach of justifying why God did these things in the Old Testament, Seibert eventually claims God did not do them.

Seibert starts out by outlining the problematic

portrayals of God that he is talking about. He confines his scope to the Old Testament historical books and divides the problematic portrayals into a number of categories – ‘God as deadly lawgiver’ – laws where the penalty for disobedience is death; ‘God as instant executioner’ – passages where God instantly strikes people dead for evil; ‘God as mass murderer’; ‘God as Divine Warrior’; ‘God as genocidal general’; ‘God as dangerous abuser’; ‘God as unfair afflictor’ – such as in the case of Job or Pharaoh’s divinely hardened heart; and ‘God as divine deceiver’, like in 1 Kings 22, where God uses deception to persuade King Ahab to go into a battle which will result in his death. It truly is a disturbing catalogue of divine behaviour.

He goes on to examine ancient approaches to disturbing divine behaviour. It’s easy to think that it’s only more sensitive modern readers like us who are disturbed by parts of the Old Testament, but the reality is that Jewish readers were disturbed by some parts before the Old Testament was even finished. Thus, Seibert gives us the example of the writer of

Chronicles who in 1 Chronicles 21:1 changes 2 Samuel 24:1 to say that Satan was responsible for prompting David to take a sinful census, rather than God. This example begs the question that if the writer of Chronicles felt he had permission to question – and “correct” – disturbing divine behaviour like this, perhaps we, with the full revelation of Jesus Christ, have similar permission?

Seibert goes on to discuss an early Christian interpreter of disturbing divine behaviour – Marcion. Marcion was so disturbed by the Old Testament that he rejected its authority altogether and produced an abbreviated New Testament, with Old Testament references cut out. It’s a good idea for Seibert to tackle Marcion directly, as he probably knows he’s going to be accused of being a Marcionite. (He insists many times that he’s not a Marcionite, that the Old Testament still holds authority for him, but that we must discern the truth and meaning of each text.) Interestingly, Marcion pursued a very literal reading of the Old Testament, more like we would make today, and this is why Marcion found the Old Testament so disturbing. Seibert contrasts other ancient interpreters who made allegorical or typological readings and were thus not disturbed by the Old Testament. Marcion anticipated our contemporary dilemmas better than these others; Seibert contends that although branding him as a heretic was necessary, the problems he had with the Old Testament came out of valid questions.

The next chapter is “Defending God’s Behaviour in the Old Testament”, surveying approaches evangelicals take to explain disturbing divine behaviour, all assuming that God did and said exactly as the Old Testament records.

- The ‘Divine immunity’ approach basically claims that by definition anything God does is good and right and thus morally defensible. It usually appeals to how little as humans we understand of God’s ways. Seibert sees this approach as inadequate because it restricts honest inquiry about the character of God. It actually dishonours God by claiming he acted in ways that are inconsistent with our basic beliefs about what is right – we have to redefine evil behaviour as ‘good’. But ‘is genocide ever good?’ (p.74)
- Another approach is ‘the just cause approach’, supplying a rationale for God’s behaviour – for example, the sin of the Canaanites was so bad they needed to be slaughtered. But what about babies? And surely the responses to some particular offenses are out of proportion – like Uzziah in 2 Samuel 6:1-11 who steadied the ark and was struck dead?

- ‘The greater good approach’ argues that in these cases God was preventing a greater evil. Seibert suggests that there is nothing more evil than causing everyone to perish in a flood.
- ‘The “God acted differently in the Old Testament” approach’ argues for a discontinuity between God’s past and present behaviour. ‘If God wanted to be known in Israel, God had to communicate to people in ways they could understand, even if that meant getting involved in messy human affairs like warfare and killing.’ (p.81) It relies on the idea of progressive revelation, on the Israelites only receiving a partial understanding of God’s character. But if God instructed the Israelites to commit genocide just because that was all they could understand at their stage in development, our questions about God’s character aren’t answered at all.
- ‘The permissive will approach’ claims that God’s instructions to violence were a compromise because of Israel’s disobedience. Because of Israel’s sinfulness, they are not given God’s perfect will, but a compromise on his will. This approach doesn’t actually rescue the text (it still inaccurately reports what God wants by failing to mention these things are not his perfect will) or God’s behaviour (He still does these disturbing things).

Coming as he does from an Anabaptist tradition, it seems strange to me that Seibert doesn’t spend longer addressing the approach of the important Anabaptist thinker, John Howard Yoder. It’s my impression that Yoder offers a way of reading the Bible that is different to any of the approaches Seibert discusses. Yoder approaches biblical texts from the ground up, finding their inspiration or theological truth in the way the writer has taken the prevailing cultural standards and worldview and transformed them. In each case, Yoder finds a trajectory toward God’s full revelation in Christ. In *The Original Revolution*, Yoder deals explicitly with one of Seibert’s test cases – that of Yahweh ordering Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Yoder doesn’t even permit us to ask the question of whether Yahweh actually asked Abraham to do this. Instead, he points out that human sacrifice was not a moral issue for the ancient reader. It is not the point of the story at all. Instead, the point is that Yahweh calls Abraham to give up the very means through which Yahweh was going to fulfil his promise to make Abraham the father of many nations – a son. Whether it was ethical to sacrifice a human was not a permissible question for the ancient Israelite. Yoder doesn’t expect the text to conform to his own ethical

expectations of God. Debating its historicity is a sidetrack for him. His viewpoint has the potential to undo a lot of Seibert's assumptions, and I would like to see some engagement with it. However, I find Yoder's point elusive - he doesn't flesh it out; people aren't going to respond to his solution in the same way many will resonate with Seibert's.

That solution of Seibert's to disturbing divine behaviour is a christocentric hermeneutic. He acknowledges that the New Testament itself has some trouble images of divine behaviour. But he insists that we can trust the depiction of Jesus in the New Testament and use him, as the fullest revelation of God, as a guide to interpreting disturbing divine behaviour. Guiding our reading of the Old Testament should be the picture of God revealed by Jesus.

- Jesus reveals a God who is kind to the wicked – such as when he calls on us to love our enemies. This aspect of God's character is only sometimes revealed in the OT.
- Jesus reveals a God who is nonviolent – again the command to love our enemies; throughout the gospels, Jesus never endorses or promotes the idea of God as a divine warrior. He lived non-violently himself and rejected violence as a way to achieve justice. Ultimately, Jesus' nonviolence is revealed in his death on the cross.
- Jesus reveals a God who does not judge people by causing historical (or natural) disasters or serious physical infirmities – recall Luke 13:1-5, where people ask Jesus what sin the Galileans committed that God let them be killed by Pilate; Jesus responds by saying that those people were no worse than the rest of us.
- Jesus reveals a God of love – a depiction that has its roots in the Old Testament, but reaches its fullest expression in Jesus and in reflections upon Jesus in the New Testament.

Seibert goes on to show his dual hermeneutic in practice – critiquing disturbing texts with a christocentric hermeneutic, but also affirming them by seeking to find what is 'salvageable' from such passages.

His final chapter offers some practical suggestions for 'talking about troubling texts':

- Stop trying to justify God's behaviour in the Old Testament – a suggestion that will immensely liberating for me, if I can follow him to here.
- Acknowledge how these texts have fostered oppression and violence
- Help people use problematic images responsibly and constructively
- Keep disturbing divine behaviour in perspective – that is, remember how much of the Old Testament is not troubling.

Seibert has an appendix dealing with Jesus' eschatological sayings and whether they can be said to reveal a nonviolent God. Strangely, his treatment of hell doesn't even consider universalism as an option – that is, the idea that ultimately God will reconcile all people to himself. To do so would seem to me to push scripture no further than he already has.

Seibert's book gripped me. For once I found myself unable to put down a theology book, when many are something of a chore to read. His writing style is engaging and he structures things logically, with many interesting insights along the way.

In the end, I think I basically agree with Seibert, although Yoder's approach of reading the text on the ground with the Israelites should be used in conjunction with it. I say 'I think' because of my evangelical origins. It shows a perversity of the evangelical mindset that I am not only disturbed by the idea that God ordered the Israelites to slaughter Canaanites, but also by the idea that he did *not* do so, if that means that a particular Old Testament story is, in an important sense, wrong.

# Jesus and Scripture

By Dave Andrews

According to the famous evangelist, Stanley Jones, the scriptures are not ‘the Word of God’; it is Jesus who is ‘the Word of God’. He says

we honour the Bible, for it leads us to his feet. But the Bible is not the revelation of God. It is the inspired record of the revelation. The revelation we have seen in the face of Jesus Christ. “You search the scriptures, imagining you possess eternal life in their pages - and they do testify to me - but you refuse to come to me for life.” (John 5v39). Eternal life is not in the pages; it is in Christ who is uncovered through the pages.<sup>1</sup>

If we focus on Christ - as Stanley Jones suggests we do - and we look at Christ’s attitude to the scriptures, it is clear that Jesus got a lot of his significant ideas from the Hebrew Bible. After all he said: ‘Do unto others as you’d have them do to you - for this is the law and prophets’ (Matt 7.12)

However Jesus did not treat all the ideas in the Hebrew Bible as equally significant. Jesus treated the Hebrew Bible as his authority (Matt 5.17-20) but *interpreted the law according to the prophets - especially the prophet Isaiah* - whom he quoted when at the start of his ministry. (Luke 4.18-19)

In the book of Isaiah there is a very distinctive revelation of the character of God that describes the God of Israel, in a way Jesus wanted the people of Israel to take as their framework of faith.

According to the bible scholar, Walter Brueggemann, God reactions to the plight of his people is portrayed very differently throughout the scriptures. In the book of Genesis, God’s reaction to Abraham’s plea for help is portrayed as *‘unresponsive’*. Leaving Abraham to question God’s character: ‘Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?’ (Gen.18:25)<sup>2</sup> In the book of Jeremiah God’s reaction to Jeremiah’s plea for help is portrayed as *‘uncompromising’*. There is a mercy, but it is ‘a severe mercy’.<sup>3</sup> Leaving Jeremiah to accuse God of ripping him off. ‘O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived.’ (Jer.20.7) In the book of Job, God’s reaction to Job’s plea for help is portrayed as *‘incomprehensible’*. Job is affirmed for having spoken ‘what is right’ (Job 42:7-8), but his questions are left unanswered – or, what is worse, answered unsatisfactorily. ‘This is a God, who when asked about justice, responds with a description of a crocodile’.<sup>4</sup> Leaving Job feeling thoroughly puzzled and totally displaced by God’s assertions.<sup>5</sup> However, in the book of Isaiah, there is a consensus among scholars that God’s reactions to Israel’s pleas for help are portrayed as

*‘compassionate’*. God’s responses portrayed in Isaiah’s ‘salvation oracles’ start with terms of endearment – like ‘my chosen ones’ (Isa.41:8-9); then move on to statements of assurance – ‘do not fear’, ‘fear not’ (Isa.41.10); and then move on to promises of real help - ‘Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.’ (Isa.41.10)<sup>6</sup> It is Isaiah’s portrayal of God that is Jesus’ portrayal of God.

Most of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is based on the book of Isaiah. When interpreting the scriptures in his Sermon, Jesus’ Isaiah-inspired prophetic portrayal of a compassionate God leads Jesus to advocate the spirit of the law, rather than the letter of the law:

- *Jesus explains the law as guidelines for love* – love of God and love of neighbour (Matt 22.34-40)
- *Jesus emphasizes ethics over ceremony and ritual* – compare Amos 5.21-24 and Matt 21.12-17
- *Jesus stresses that righteousness mean justice* -radically inclusive and egalitarian (Luke 4.18-19)
- *Jesus always focuses on the heart of the issue* – the causes - not symptoms - of injustice (Matt 7.18-23)

As far as Jesus is concerned, the *‘greatest’* commandment in the Old Testament is to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself. *All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.*’ (Matt 22.37-40) So, as far as Jesus is concerned, everything in the Old Testament needed to be interpreted in the light of these two commandments. Jesus seemed to have no qualms about quoting only the bits of scripture that he thought were consonant with these commandments (Luke 4:18-19 from Isa.61:1-2) and/or contradicting those bits of scripture he thought were not consistent with these commandments (Matt.5:38-39).

## Questions for meditation and discussion

1. What would it mean for us to see Jesus as the Word of God?
2. What would it mean for us to use Jesus as our hermeneutic to interpret the scriptures?
3. What would it mean for us to use Jesus’ hermeneutic to interpret the scriptures like Jesus did?

<sup>1</sup>S. Jones, *The Way* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947), p52

<sup>2</sup>W. Brueggemann, *Finally Comes The Poet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) p57-8.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid p59-60

<sup>4</sup>Ibid p61

<sup>5</sup>Ibid p62

<sup>6</sup>Ibid p63-64



# Christianity, Christi-Anarchy & Killing

By Dave Andrews



I've just been reading a book called *On Killing*. It's a study about killing in combat. And it is not written by a pacifist propagandist, but by a credible military paratrooper psychologist named Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman.<sup>1</sup>

Grossman cites research that suggests that - contrary to some of our most famous cultural stereotypes - 'the vast majority of men are *not* born killers' (p.31). At most only 2% of men could be considered aggressive psychopathic personalities with a predisposition towards killing (p.189). This statistic is reflected in the kill figures of fighter pilots in World War II, where only 1% of fighter pilots accounted for more than 40% of all enemy planes shot down (p.110).

Grossman quotes Brigadier S.L.A. Marshall, whose study of soldiers' conduct in World War II suggests 'that the average healthy individual has such a resistance towards killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility' (p.1). A view that is reflected in the shots-per-soldier and the kills-per-shot recorded in every major war from the Civil War through to World War I up until World War II. During this period, when it became possible to measure shots fired in combat, research has showed that the vast majority of soldiers - between 75 and 95% - either did not fire their weapon - even when fired upon - or only fired into the air - refusing to kill the enemy - even when given orders to do so (p.3).

In Civil War times, conscience-stricken soldiers had the option of pretending to fire - that is, loading up their muskets, mimicking the movements of a firing soldier next to them, and pretending to recoil. These soldiers would then be carrying loaded weapons or would have loaded their weapons multiple times. When the fighting at Gettysburg was over, 27,574 muskets were found on the battlefield. Over 90% were loaded. Given that loading a weapon took roughly twenty times as long as firing it, the chances of these muskets representing mostly soldiers cut

down just as they intended to shoot are slim. But then how do you explain the 12,000 multiply-loaded weapons, with 6,000 of them loaded with 3-10 rounds apiece? The most obvious answer is these soldiers could not fire their weapons. "Most soldiers were trying not to kill the enemy. Most appear to have not wanted to fire in the enemy's general direction."(p.23)

The Battle of Gettysburg is considered one of America's bloodiest battles, but as Grossman shows, it could have been a great deal bloodier. Averages and estimates suggest that during Napoleonic and Civil War times, an entire regiment, firing from a range of thirty yards, would hit only one or two men a minute.

Let's break down the numbers. A regiment contains between 200 and 1,000 men. A soldier operating at peak efficiency could get off 1-5 shots per minute. During training, these soldiers were 25% accurate at 225 yards, 40% accurate at 150 yards, and 60% accurate at 70 yards. So, taking the most modest of these estimates - a 200 man regiment shooting once per minute with 25% accuracy - you would expect to see about 50 hits, which would be more than 25 times greater than that which actually happened.

As one officer observed, 'It seems strange that a company of men can fire volley after volley at a like number of men at not over a distance of fifteen steps and not cause a single casualty. Yet such was the facts in this instance.' (p.20) What was happening? Soldiers were resorting to a range of options that meant that they didn't have to kill. Some fell back to support positions. A few faked injury or ran away. Many fired into the air.

Colonel Milton Mater's uncle said the most significant fact he could remember about his combat experience in the World War I was 'draftees who wouldn't shoot' (p.29).

Gwynne Dyer says that apart from 'the occasional psychopath who really wants to slice people open' most

soldiers on both sides of World War II were interested in 'damage limitation' (p.6). And 'all forces had somewhere near the same rate of non-firers' (p.16).

According to Brigadier Marshall 'At the vital point' (when a soldier has to decide to fire or not) the average healthy individual '*becomes a conscientious objector.*' (p.1) [emphasis mine]

When the military realized what was happening, they embarked on a new program to turn their soldiers into killers. They knew that while they couldn't change the vast majority of men's natural aversion to killing, they could put could soldiers under sustained systematic pressure to kill through five strategies.

### 1. Reframing killing as saving lives

As it has become clear that most people are motivated to serve and to preserve life, the military has taken the desire to serve and preserve life and used it to make people killers by telling them that killing is the only way they can save the lives of those they love. Soldiers in Iraq are told killing terrorists is the only way to save the lives of civilians.

### 2. Portraying the enemy as sub-human

In World War II, it became clear that soldiers found it harder to kill people they could identify with and easier to kill people they couldn't identify with. Only 6% of Americans said they wanted to kill Germans; while 44% said they wanted to kill the Japanese (p.162). So in recent times, the military has encouraged soldiers to see the enemy as 'ragheads' rather than humans (p.161). As it has become clear it is harder for soldiers to kill people who are innocent; but easier to kill people who are guilty, 'ragheads' are deemed bloodthirsty, baby killers in advance (p.165).

### 3. Increasing the distance between the trigger and the target

Most soldiers find it difficult to kill up close and personal. It has always been easier to kill from a distance and to pretend it's not personal. Sailors shoot up 'ships'. Aviators shoot down 'planes' (p.58). The artillery attack enemy 'lines' (p.58). 'They can pretend they are not killing human beings.' (p.108)

Through technology, the military is increasing the distance between the trigger and the target as quickly as it can. Through night goggles for example when a soldier shoots someone they say it's just like shooting on a TV show - 'as if it's happening on a TV screen' (p.170).

### 4. Demanding every soldier's obedience to their leader

Sigmund Freud said 'never underestimate the power of the need to obey' (p.142). Those with no combat experience presume that 'being fired upon' was the reason most soldiers fired. However, veterans of combat say that being 'ordered to fire' was the reason most soldiers fired (p.143). Without an order to fire soldiers many soldiers would not fire, even when they came face to face with the enemy in combat (p.144).

Stanley Milgram's experiments at Yale prove that more than 65% of people will obey authority figures to the point of inflicting (seemingly) lethal shocks on strangers (p.141).

Gwynne Dyer said in his book on war that while 'the vast majority of men are not born killers'; nonetheless 'men will kill under compulsion - men will do almost anything if they know it is expected of them and they are under strong social pressure to comply' (p.31).

Since Marshall's report on surprisingly low firing rates, the military have tried to increase soldiers' compliance with orders to fire through social learning, classical conditioning and operant conditioning.

Through social learning, soldiers have been socialized to imitate role models like the ANZAC legends who obeyed orders to attack impregnable positions in Gallipoli - even when it was obvious to everyone that the orders were insane and to obey them was suicidal (p.306). Through the classical conditioning devised by Pavlov to make dogs salivate at the sound of a bell, soldiers have been conditioned to associate obeying the orders of drill sergeants with rewards (pleasure), and disobeying orders with punishment (pain) And through behavioural engineering devised by Skinner to make rats through mazes soldiers have been engineered to increase their automatic quick shoot reflex by repeatedly shooting at targets which look like people in simulated battlefield conditions to such a degree that an average infantryman now has a 95% shot-per-soldier rate and a marksman now has a 1.39 kill-per-shot ratio (p.255-6).

### 5. Developing each unit's capacity for collective violence

Research has shown that the greatest fear of a man in combat is not the fear of death but of 'letting others down' (p.52).

So the military have used peer pressure - along with the intensification of power and the diffusion of responsibility that a group provides ('there were so many guys firing, you can never be sure it was you' who killed someone) - to turn men into killers. Konrad Lorenz says: 'Man is not a killer, but the group is.' (p.151-152)

Grossman concludes his book *On Killing* by saying that the same techniques used by the military are now being used by the media in society at large - and that not only soldiers, but also civilians, are being socialized to kill

without constraints by watching movie heroes like *Dirty Harry* kill outside the constraints of the law (p.325); being desensitized to the act of killing by seeing thousands of people killing on television (p.329); and being engineered to kill reflexively by shooting at human targets with model guns in life-like video games (p.319). Grossman says '*we are learning to kill and learning to like it*'(p.315) [emphasis mine].

## The Christi-Anarchy Alternative

I would like suggest that in our culture that while mainline Christianity supports the basic assumptions that make it possible to program men to kill like this, the sensibility nurtured by Christi-Anarchy would make such a social construction of killing totally impossible. Christi-Anarchy is nothing more or less than a Christ-like sensibility.<sup>2</sup>

I would like to suggest while the ideology of Christianity supports the basic assumptions that make it possible to program men to kill, the Christ-like sensibility of Christi-Anarchy not only opposes that set of assumptions, but also provides a set of disciplines which can help us disrupt the operations which make such a social construction of killing possible.

Christianity aids and abets the training of people as killers by making it acceptable, if regrettable, to kill; increasing the distance between 'us' and 'them' so we do not see the humanity of the 'other'; teaching us to submit to the authorities, keep the rules and obey the leaders; and encouraging us to conform to the groups that we happen to be a part of.

However Christi-Anarchy critiques and challenges the training of people as killers by making it unacceptable to kill anyone in any circumstance; decreasing the distance between 'us' and 'them' so that we see the humanity of the 'other'- even our 'enemies'; teaching us to submit yet subvert the authorities, keep some rules but break others and only obey leaders up to a point; and encouraging us not to conform to the groups we happen to be a part of.

If we want to prevent the continued social construction of killing in our society, we need to help the 'conscientious objector' at the heart of 'every healthy individual man and woman'.

### 1. We need to be clear Christ calls us to be willing to die - but to never kill for our faith

The patron saint of conscientious objectors must surely be the illustrious Martin of Tours.

Martin was born about 316 in Sabaria, in Hungary. His father was a tribune in the Imperial Horse Guard of the Roman Army, and named his son 'Martin' after 'Mars', the god of war.

Martin showed an interest in Christianity from an early age; but his father was suspicious of Christianity and discouraged his son from pursuing his interest. However, at the age of ten, against his father's wishes, Martin went to the church, knocked on the door, and begged them to take him as a *catechumen* or candidate for baptism. In contemplative prayer, the young Martin said he found the spirituality he was looking for.

At the time, there was a law that made it mandatory for the sons of veterans to serve in the Roman Army. So, at the age of fifteen, Martin was forced to join the military. Martin refused to cooperate. He was put in chains until he promised he would take the orders he was given. He was then assigned to a cavalry unit. While in the army, Martin tried to live like a monk rather than a soldier. As an officer, he was entitled to a servant, but he switched roles with his servant, cleaning his servant's boots instead of the other way round.

Around 334, Martin was sent as an officer to do garrison duty in Gaul (now France). On one bitter winter day, while Martin - fully dressed in his warm military winter gear - was riding towards the gates of Amiens, he came across a ragged beggar - whose clothes were in tatters - freezing, half-naked, in the cold. Martin was overcome with compassion. He took off his beautiful, white, lambs-wool, officer's cloak, slashed it in two with his sword, wrapped one half of it round the beggar and then draped the other half back around his own shoulders. That night Martin had a dream. In that dream he saw Jesus wearing the half of the lambs wool cloak he had given to the beggar, and heard Jesus saying to the saints who were crowding round him: "Look at this cloak, Martin the *catechumen* gave it to me!" When he awoke, Martin went and got baptised straightaway. But it would be two more years before Martin could leave the legion and follow his vocation.

In the meantime, Martin struggled with the conflicting demands of trying to live as a 'soldier of Christ' in a Roman Legion. The conflict came to a head when the Franks invaded the northern borders of the empire, and Martin refused to fight, saying: "Put me in the front of the army, without weapons or armour; but I will not draw sword again. I am become the soldier of Christ." His commander said he was more than happy to grant Martin's request; and put him in prison until he was ready to send Martin to the front.

However, the next day the Franks made peace; and Martin was discharged from the army.

Martin became a bishop and continued his campaign against killing for the rest of his life.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. We need to decrease the personal and relational distance between 'us' and 'them' and to see the humanity of the 'other'- especially the humanity of our 'enemies'

Following in the footsteps of Martin were a bunch of

soldiers on the front in World War I.

In 1914, trenches occupied by French and Scottish troops lay a few metres away from their German counterparts. On Christmas Day a magical event occurred that would forever emblazon the history books with a moment of humanity in the midst of the brutality. The Germans placed Christmas trees above their trench, while Scottish bagpipers played along to the operatic voices they heard wafting over from the German camp. Then, miraculously, the men from both sides climbed out of their trenches and met one another in No Man's Land for a Christmas celebration. The enemies made friends, showed each other pictures of their lovers, and played soccer in the snow with one another. When ordered to commence hostilities again the next day the men refused to fire on one another. The officers were disciplined and their units were disbanded.

### **3. We need to submit yet subvert the authorities, keep some rules but break others and only obey leaders to the degree that their demands reflect real love for our neighbours**

An unknown soldier in World War II acted like Martin and paid the ultimate price.

In the Netherlands, the Dutch tell of a German soldier who was a member of an execution squad ordered to shoot innocent hostages. Suddenly he stepped out of rank and refused to participate in the execution. On the spot he was charged with treason by the officer in charge and was placed with the hostages, where he was promptly executed by his comrades. He responded in the crucial moment to the voice of conscience (refused to obey his orders) and those who hear of the episode cannot fail to be inspired.<sup>4</sup>

Dave Grossman says: *'This – ultimately - may be the price of noncompliance for men of conscience. (In) overcoming obedience-demanding-authority and the instinct for self preservation, this German soldier gives us hope for mankind.'* (p.228) [emphasis mine]

### **4. We need to refuse to conform to group pressure, the intensification of power and the diffusion of responsibility which turns groups of people into killing machines.**

The best contemporary example of a Martin of Tours that I know is Bruce French from Tasmania. When he was conscripted as a soldier to fight in the Vietnam War, Bruce joined the infantry, as he felt that as a follower of Jesus he should not use his conscientious objection to the war as an excuse to avoid the dangers other young men

were being forced to face. However, as a follower of Jesus, Bruce decided that while he was prepared to face the dangers of combat with the unit he was part of, he was not prepared to pick up a rifle in anger, let alone fire it at anyone, regardless of how much pressure he was put under.

So Bruce went through basic training for the military at the Enoggera Army Barracks with a steadfast refusal to pick up his rifle. As you can imagine, Bruce was ridiculed, bullied, and abused right throughout his basic training. But his steadfast refusal to pick up his rifle under any circumstances was unshakable – his rock-solid resolve absolutely unbreakable.

Other men in his unit really gave him a hard time - until the day they had to do bayonet practice. Then, when they were confronted with the brutality of thrusting the bayonet on their rifle into the vital organs of a living breathing human being, they were forced to face the violence of killing. And that night, he said, they came to him quietly, one by one, and told him, that now they understood why he had taken the stand that he had. And never gave him a hard time again.

The war was over before his unit was sent to the front, so Bruce never had the chance to test his resolve in combat. But as most soldiers say that their fear of letting their unit down is greater than their fear of facing up to enemy fire, I think Bruce would have stood the test.

## **Conclusion**

If we want to stop the continued social construction of killing in our society, I believe the best way we can do it is to advocate Christi-Anarchy - the radical, sacrificial, nonviolent compassion of Christ, which is committed to the care of friends and enemies alike, over against the commands of the authorities and demands of their agencies to do otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup>Dave Grossman *On Killing* Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company New York 2009.

<sup>2</sup>Dave Andrews *Not Religion But Love* Tafina Press Armidale 1999, p6..

<sup>3</sup>Dave Andrews 'Martin Of Tours' in *People Of Compassion* TEAR Blackburn 2008 p.7-9.

<sup>4</sup>Dave Grossman (2009) p.227-8.

# Member Profile: Gary and Eleanor Baker



## *1. What interests you most about Anabaptism?*

We became interested in Anabaptism by being part of a Mennonite Anabaptist community. In 1989, while in North Carolina USA, we were welcomed to the Durham Mennonite Church community by people who were humble, honest, and dedicated to lives of Christian discipleship.

It felt as though a great light showed us a different way of living and being. Three features stood out. Truth was the first and clearest feature. Tricks, mirrors and hypocrisy were gone. Extraordinary that the teachings, stories, and actions of Jesus could be the template for the way of our life. Challenging that non-violence is a central component of discipleship. There was wonderful feeling of coming home in this faith community.

Interest in Anabaptism has grown ever since, through history, stories, meeting, talking with people through the Anabaptist networks (AAANZ) and the larger faith community

## *2. Favourite part of Bible?*

The New Testament, particularly the Gospels is the favourite part of the Bible. Of the Gospels, John chapters 14 -17. stand out, with the focus on community - the coming of the Holy Spirit, the metaphor of the vine, and Jesus' prayer.

## *3. Least favourite part of Bible?*

The Old Testament has been a challenge

## *4. Your church involvement, present and/or past?*

We both grew up in Christian families and Eleanor – Methodist in Queenstown, South Africa, and Gary – Anglican Sunday School in Sydney, Australia but both moved away from Christianity in early adulthood. Whilst undertaking post-doctoral studies in North Carolina, we were attracted to, joined, and were baptised in the Durham Mennonite Church 1987-8. After we returned to Sydney we joined Mark & Mary Hurst,



*Sheep on the Bakers' farm*

and their family to form the Sydney Mennonite Fellowship in 1990-92. In 1992 we moved to Armidale, New England, and joined the St Mark's Chapel, at the University of New England. Since 1995 we have been involved with the AAANZ in different ways

*5. How do you spend your time – work, study, etc? Any thoughts how it fits in with your faith?*

We work in a consultant physician medical practice in Armidale. We feel privileged that our faith and work can be so close; as we try to meet health needs of the people we live with. Until recently much time was spent with our children, but since our children have recently left home, we are adjusting.

*6. A book or a writer who has inspired you in your discipleship?*

Two books had a significant impact on our early discipleship. John Howard Yoder's– *What would you do? A Serious Answer to a Standard Question* was studied in a small group in the Durham Mennonite Church. The book opened our eyes to the possibilities of non-violent responses to violence, and helped our commitment to Christ's call to non-violence in all forms. The other book is the Mennonite Cook Book, *More with Less*, by Doris Longacre, which encouraged us to consume less so others could eat enough. Both books reached out to other people, challenged the prevailing

USA culture and were Christian responses at personal and institutional levels.

Other writers, Robert Banks, Athol Gill, and Chris Marshall, have been inspirational.

*7. Politics?*

Independent – Labor spectrum.

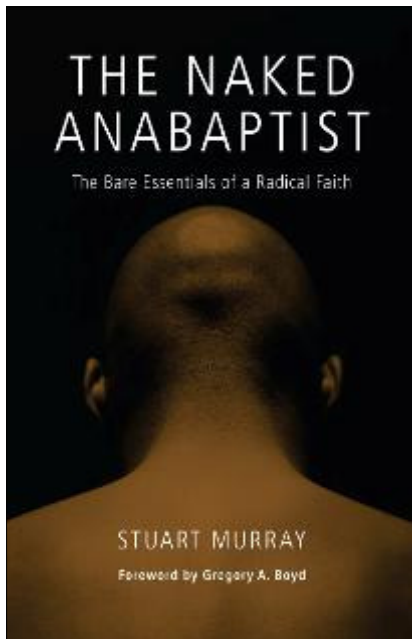
*8. Pastimes?*

We live on a small property, a “hobby farm” on the outskirts of Armidale. We graze sheep and/or cattle, have chooks, vegetable gardens, rely on tank water, and deal with our waste. A significant part of our free time is spent in these activities. We still enjoy walking, particularly with overnight stops, cycling, swimming, and surfing. Eleanor is a quilter, knitter, and stitcher with a number of projects on the go at any time.



## BOOKS

# The Naked Anabaptist



### The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith

Stuart Murray (Herald Press, 2010)

*The publication of this book is so important to Anabaptism in our context that we're featuring two reviews, covering different angles.*

## Doug Hynd's review

Stuart Murray has been a central figure in the Anabaptist Network in the United Kingdom and has made a highly significant contribution to current debate on Christian mission and the church after Christendom. Students in my subject Christianity and Australian Society who have read his challenging work *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* have responded enthusiastically to his account of the time in which we find ourselves.

In much of Stuart's writing Anabaptism has provided the lens through which he has viewed issues of church and mission. In *The Naked Anabaptist* he turns his attention to examine the structure and character of the lens. Understanding the role of metaphors is

important for understanding what Murray is doing here.

Anabaptism till the late twentieth century has been largely clothed in the ethnic garb provided by the Mennonites and the Amish with their historic roots in 16th century Europe. The scholarship and publications of John Howard Yoder has almost certainly done more than any other factor to raise the possibility that this form of clothing was not of the essence of the movement.

What, Murray asks, might Anabaptism look like if stripped of that specific ethnic clothing? This way of asking the question does not mean that he thinks there is, or could be, any such thing as a pure Anabaptism free of cultural form, or uninfluenced by historical and social expression.

Though Murray uses the chapter heading "The Essence of Anabaptism" he undercuts any easy assumption of an "essence" of Anabaptism that could be intellectually distilled from the lived reality. Indeed he acknowledges that

... there is strictly no such things as a "naked Anabaptist". Anabaptist values and practices are always clothed in particular cultures. ... these values are worked out in fresh ways in parts of the world where Mennonite missionaries have shared their faith and planted churches ... and Anabaptism looks different again in post-Christendom societies in which Christians today are reappropriating its values and practices. (pp.43-44)

That said, Murray argues that it can be helpful to strip back historical and cultural trappings that have become encrusted on the traditions as they have developed across the centuries. Such an exercise can enable us to glimpse afresh, he argues, what brought the tradition into existence and continues to attract people to the tradition. What results from this exercise is in fact an account of an Anabaptism that is being shaped by the experience of a Christian community becoming aware that it is moving, however uncertainly, into a post-Christendom reality.

The account of "naked Anabaptism" that he offers us is shaped explicitly as a commentary on the seven core convictions developed by the Anabaptist

Network in the United Kingdom. The convictions, that have been found to be valuable by AAANZ as a helpful guide to Anabaptism, are:

1. Jesus is our example, teacher, friend, redeemer and Lord. He is the source of our life, the central reference point for our faith and lifestyle, for our understanding of church and our engagement with society. We are committed to following Jesus as well as worshipping him.
2. Jesus is the focal point of God's revelation. We are committed to a Jesus-centred approach to the Bible, and to the community of faith as the primary context in which we read the Bible and discern and apply its implications for discipleship.
3. Western culture is slowly emerging from the Christendom era when church and state jointly presided over a society in which almost all were assumed to be Christian. Whatever its positive contributions on values and institutions, Christendom seriously distorted the gospel, marginalised Jesus, and has left the churches ill-equipped for mission in a post-Christendom culture. As we reflect on this, we are committed to learning from the experience and perspectives of movements such as Anabaptism that rejected standard Christendom assumptions and pursued alternative ways of thinking and behaving.
4. The frequent association of the church with status, wealth and force is inappropriate for followers of Jesus and damages our witness. We are committed to exploring ways of being good news to the poor, powerless and persecuted, aware that such discipleship may attract opposition, resulting in suffering and sometimes ultimately martyrdom.
5. Churches are called to be committed communities of discipleship and mission, places of friendship, mutual accountability and multi-voiced worship. As we eat together, sharing bread and wine, we sustain hope as we seek God's kingdom together. We are committed to nurturing and developing such churches, in which young and old are valued, leadership is consultative, roles are related to gifts rather than gender and baptism is for believers.
6. Spirituality and economics are interconnected. In an individualist and consumerist culture and in a world where economic injustice is rife, we are committed to finding ways of living simply, sharing generously, caring for creation, and working for justice.
7. Peace is at the heart of the gospel. As followers of Jesus in a divided and violent world, we are committed to finding non-

violent alternatives and to learning how to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society, and between nations.

The core of the book is devoted to four chapters that expound the meaning and significance of these convictions.

The final two chapters in the book change gear and are devoted to a brief account of the emergence of the original Anabaptists, a survey of its weaknesses as they have been historically manifested and an account of spirituality and discipleship in Anabaptism today. The book also includes an appendix with a short list of resources and websites and a helpful study guide that would make this very useful for group discussions.

This is a really valuable book written in highly accessible language. Beyond those who are directly interested in Anabaptism this would provide a good introduction to contemporary Christian discipleship more broadly.

One passage in the chapter on following Jesus spoke powerfully to me and I will quote at length to give you a sense of the author's style.

Maybe we need to stop calling ourselves 'Christians'. Not only is the term compromised by its associations and debased by overuse, it is also rather presumptuous. Who are we to claim that we are like Christ? If others want to refer to us in this way, because they see us as Christlike, well and good - this seems to have been how the term was first used (see Acts 11:26). But maybe we need a term that is both purposeful and restrained. Maybe we should claim no more (or less) than that we are "followers of Jesus."

As followers we do not claim to have arrived at the destination, nor need we distinguish ourselves from others who are at different stages of the journey. Belonging, believing and behaving can all be interpreted as aspects of following. Churches committed to following Jesus welcome fellow travelers and unconditionally. But their ethos is one of following, learning, changing, growing, moving forward. Together, and as we reflect on the Gospels (and the rest of Scripture), we discover more of what it means to follow Jesus.

Such churches may be very good news indeed for those who need to time to work through the implications of the story of Jesus that they have encountered for the first time. And to those who are more interested in lifestyle issues than theological beliefs. And to those who "use" journey imagery to describe their search for spiritual meaning. And to those of us who know we still have some way to go in following Jesus and are grateful for the support and encouragement of others who are on the same journey. (p.61)



## Nathan Hobby's review

I'm excited by the publication of Stuart Murray's *The Naked Anabaptist*. It fills that big gap for Anabaptists to explain just why they call themselves that. If someone asks us what an Anabaptist is, the temptation is to begin with a history lesson about the sixteenth century Reformation. The problem is that we probably only have about thirty seconds of someone's attention, and we've spent it all just trying to get some bare bones down, differentiating the original Anabaptists from the other Reformers. No time to draw the connections to what that means for today.

Stuart Murray avoids this problem by saving the history lesson to the penultimate chapter, and it works. He lays out what an Anabaptist is today and gives some minimal historical background, before finally unveiling the whole history at the end. A much better approach for your average listener/ reader.

In Murray's opening chapter, he deals with a lot of 'But aren'ts' that I've certainly heard a number of time – 'But aren't Anabaptists just another denomination?'; 'But aren't Anabaptists hung up on the issue of baptism?'; 'But aren't Anabaptists separatists?'; 'But aren't Anabaptists all pacifists?' (Answers: No, No, Sometimes but No, and No but Yes.) This chapter also helpfully surveys the influence of Anabaptism beyond the Mennonite Church, in countries like Britain and Australia without a Mennonite presence – including, gratifyingly, a mention of this journal.

From my perspective, Murray gets the essence of Anabaptism just right. He deals with the centrality of Jesus for ethics and reading Scripture. He explains the Anabaptist critique of the church-state alliance and the appropriateness of the Anabaptist model of doing things for our post-Christendom context. He explains an Anabaptist vision for the church, with accountability and multi-voiced congregations two key elements. He then sums up the Anabaptist focus on justice and peace as central to the gospel rather than consequences of it, or added extras.

His brief history of the Anabaptist movement is well handled, giving an outline of the differences between the three different geographic origins of the movement in Europe and explaining the denominations which arose out of this. He finishes the book by exploring some of the weaknesses and criticisms of the movement and affirming its value for today.

It's interesting that one of the weaknesses of the movement he names is 'intellectualism/ anti-intellectualism'. The conservative, simple living



*Stuart Murray*

communities which have guarded Anabaptism for centuries tend to be anti-intellectual – Amish, for example, certainly don't have much time for intellectualism. In contrast, neo-Anabaptists tend to have a very intellectual approach to Anabaptism and may have come to the faith by reading (as I partly did).

A minor quibble I have with the book is the lack of an index. The book looks attractive, though, and has a foreword by popular pastor-theologian, Gregory Boyd, meaning it will hopefully sell well at Christian bookshops. I think everyone who has an interest in Anabaptism but doesn't quite understand it (or can't put the different threads together) should read it. For everyone identifying with the movement, it's an excellent book to buy in order to lend out. It's an especially important book for Australian and New Zealand Anabaptists, written as it is from the same context we find ourselves in – Anabaptists-by-choice, without a church.

Australian Christian bookstore Koorong have listed the book on their website; if you order from them, it might encourage them to stock it on their shelves. If you are buying online from Australia or New Zealand, the best price is at Book Depository; as of 11 June 2010, it's just under A\$15, including postage.

# Contributor Profiles

Thanks to all our contributors who have made this issue so interesting and diverse.

**Dave Andrews** is a well known Christian community worker in Queensland and author of countless books. His website is [www.daveandrews.com.au](http://www.daveandrews.com.au)

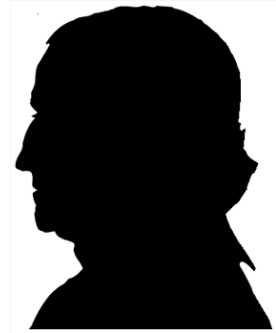
**Philip Friesen** is a US scholar who blogs at [www.galileanfellows.org/category/friesen/](http://www.galileanfellows.org/category/friesen/).

**Mark Hurst** is, with wife Mary, one of the staffworkers for the AAANZ.

**Doug Hynd** is a public servant in Canberra and author of the blog <http://doug-subversivevoices.blogspot.com/>.

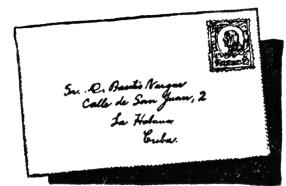
**Jeanette Mathews** is a PhD candidate at Charles Sturt University and lives in Canberra.

**John Olley** is the retired principal of Vose Seminary in Perth and an Old Testament scholar. His most recent book is a commentary on the Septuagint version of Ezekiel (Brill, 2009).



## How to...SUBSCRIBE

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## How to...CONTRIBUTE

Submissions are welcome. To contribute, please send your piece to the editor, Nathan Hobby, [nathanhobby@gmail.com](mailto:nathanhobby@gmail.com). Submissions should be in Microsoft Word (any version) or Rich Text Format. Photos or illustrations are helpful.

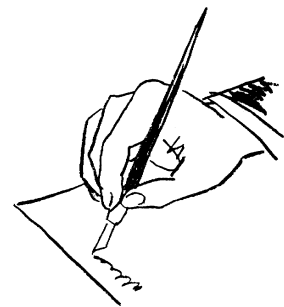
For referencing please use in-text style, with author, date and page number in brackets, followed by a bibliography at the end. **Please don't use endnotes or footnotes.**

**In issue 45, we're exploring the Australian Federal Election.**

Suggestions for articles:

- Anabaptist responses to the Religious Right
- What sort of involvement in parliamentary politics is appropriate for disciples of Jesus?
- Responses to particular issues—mining tax, climate change, maternity leave.
- New Zealanders are also very welcome to write about politics in their country.

**The deadline will depend on when the election is called, as the publication date will be *before* the election. So please get your submissions in ASAP; by 31 July should be safe. 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](http://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.

