



ON THE ROAD

Journal of the
*Anabaptist Association of
Australia and New Zealand Inc*

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THE VIEW FROM EPHESIANS FOUR MARK AND MARY HURST

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



We started the March 2001 issue of **ON THE ROAD** (#11) with the following:

"To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly."

Henri Bergson

"Just because everything is different doesn't mean that anything has changed."
Irene Peter

*Not everything is different but change has come to **On The Road**. Doug Hynd as editor faithfully guided this newsletter through its first three years and ten editions. The newsletter found a name and became a place to find news, book reviews and articles on Anabaptist topics. Well done Doug. Now he has passed the editorship on to us."*

It is now our turn to pass on the Editor's role to someone new. Beginning with the next issue, Nathan Hobby will be the editor. He comes to the role as an avid reader,

experienced writer, and one who is passionate about Anabaptist community life. Read more about him in his introduction in this issue.

This is not only a change in editorial leadership for AAANZ's journal but a sign of generational change. AAANZ is committed to having young adults become an active part of the network. Moriah Hurst addressed the topic of ministry to young adults in our most recent AAANZ Tele-Conversation. Not many of you were part of the phone conference so we are providing a summary of Moriah's important talk in this issue.

This issue also continues discussion around the issue of monasticism. Dave Andrews shares his view and Gordon Preece and Mark Barnard respond.

We enjoyed our time as editors and look forward to where Nathan is going to take **ON THE ROAD** in the future. Please give him the same support we received by contributing articles, letters, and book reviews.

We hope to continue sharing our pastoral thoughts with you in this column as

On The Road

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COVER SYMBOL:

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

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we all seek to follow Jesus daily on the road of our lives.

On a personal note, we will be attending the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Paraguay in mid-July and then travelling to the U.S. for five weeks of fundraising.

Starting in August, we will be employed by the Mennonite Mission Network in the U.S. and AAANZ here in OZ and NZ. This move involves a new funding arrangement between

Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc.

us, Mennonite churches in North America, and AAANZ. Our task is to have new funding in place by September. We would appreciate your prayers concerning the financial challenge we face. There is much to be done to get our funding level up to where it should be for us to continue our work with AAANZ. We would greatly appreciate any financial help you could give as well. Thank you for your support.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DOUG SEWELL

Jesus + Community + Reconciliation

I wrote in the last issue of *On The Road* that the network of people who make up

the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand is an emerging movement. We find inspiration from a belief that faith in Jesus comes alive at the centre through life in community and the work of reconciliation as peacemakers.

The AAANZ vision is:

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

Our draft mission statement also reflects this: *The Anabaptist Association links people in Australia and New Zealand who share a passion for Jesus, community and reconciliation and works to bring healing and hope to others by joyfully following Jesus into the world.*

Jesus, community and reconciliation are 'Big Words' loaded with meaning. The difficulty of language is that big words in themselves can evoke quite different understandings for different people. The AAANZ executive wants to give more content to the words in the form of a statement of the values that we hold closely and which inspire and guide us.

In the spirit of inclusiveness and open discussion, I'd like to put to the readers of **ON THE ROAD** for consideration and feedback a draft values statement, which is in the process of on-going refinement that reads:

- * **Jesus** is the focal point of God's revelation. He is all of Example, Teacher, Friend, Redeemer, Lord and even more. He is the source and central reference

point for faith and lifestyle, and for an understanding of church that is engaged with society. To follow Jesus is to also worship him.

* **Communities** of faith and churches are called to be centres of discipleship and mission. They are meant to be multi-voiced worshipping communities, places of friendship and accountability, living in God's kingdom in active anticipation of it's coming in full. Young and old are valued, consultative leadership is exercised, and roles are related to gifts rather than gender.

* **Reconciliation** is at the heart of the gospel and God's desire for all of creation. In an often violent world, Anabaptists are committed to Jesus' way of non-violence and to learning how to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society and between nations. Reconciliation also includes living responsibly as caretakers of the Earth.

Your opinions are welcome. Please comment and make suggestions of how we can better describe our vision, mission and values. Reply to aaanz@iprimus.com.au

Be part of the AAANZ community
in prayer, tele-conversations
with interesting speakers
and hospitality as you travel.
Applications online at
www.anabaptist.asn.au

INTRODUCTION OF NEW *ON THE ROAD* EDITOR

NATHAN HOBBY



Dear **ON THE ROAD** readers,

From the next issue, I'll be the editor of **ON THE ROAD**. I'm looking forward to it and I already have lots of ideas buzzing around in my head.

I've been a part of AAANZ since 2003, and my wife Nicole and I have met a lot of you at the last three conferences.

You might say I came to be an Anabaptist through an Alpha course in 1999, which sounds strange. It wasn't Nicky Gumbel who did it at all. Instead, it was my table leader, Ian Packer, who was doing his honours thesis on the Anabaptists. I was eighteen and he was saying all sorts of things I'd never heard before, growing up as I did in a conservative Baptist church.

He got me reading John Howard Yoder, and in Yoder I found a theological vision that inspired me. In fact, I wanted everyone to appreciate Yoder like I did, so I wrote simplifications for *The Politics of Jesus* (2003) and *Body Politics* (2006), which you can find on my theology blog 'An Anabaptist in Perth' - <http://perthanabaptists.wordpress.com>.

Between 2003 and 2007, I was a part of Perth Anabaptist Fellowship, a house church begun by the Schillings and the Duckhams

over here in Western Australia. During that time Nicole and I met, fell in love and married. That church meant a lot to me - I passionately believe that Anabaptism needs to be embodied in church - and I spent a time feeling lost after it disbanded.

These days, Nicole and I are a part of Network Vineyard Church as well as a house church which meets once a fortnight and has the nickname of 'Anabaptists Anonymous'. I am the librarian at Vose Seminary, a Baptist funded theological college which has an impressive Anabaptist collection. I also write novels and am currently working on my third, *The Library of Babel*, as part of a Masters degree at the University of Western Australia. Nicole is working for the Department of Treasury and Finance in their graduate program.

I'd love you to contribute to **ON THE ROAD**. Please get in touch with me by email - nathanhobby@gmail.com - or phone 0405 097 008.

Shalom, Nathan.

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON MONASTICISM - OLD AND NEW

Dave Andrews



This is a critical reflection. Let me be clear right from the start about what I am and am *not* criticizing. I am criticizing monasticism as paradigm. I am *not* criticizing monastics as people. I am criticizing the concept of monasticism - the construct, the structure, the system. I am *not* criticizing the spirit of my heroes who were part of the Old Monastic Movement or the passion of my friends who are part of the New Monastic Movement.

Having said that, this article is essentially a critical - rather than appreciative

- reflection, because over the years I have become quite alarmed about some aspects of Monasticism.

Now let us be clear about our terms. 'Monasticism' (from Greek, *monachos*, derived from Greek *monos*, alone) 'is the religious practice in which one renounces worldly pursuits in order to fully devote one's life to spiritual work'.¹ A 'monastic' is a religious person living a 'cloistered' - or communal - life under religious vows - such as poverty, celibacy and obedience - 'sequestered' - or separated - from the world.²

Monasticism is a spiritual tradition that can be found in many different religions - including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. It is a tradition to which people

have turned as a way of developing total dedication to spiritual priorities.³

Christian Monastics

Monasticism was a spiritual tradition that emerged as ‘an ongoing reform movement in about the middle of the 4th century’. It was ‘an attempt to live a stricter, more “apostolic” form of Christianity through prayer, manual labour and mortification.’⁴ Monasticism at its best is represented in the Christian tradition by Basil, Benedict, Aidan, Francis and Nilus.

In 357AD, after visiting monasteries in Mesopotamia, Palestine, Syria and Egypt, **Basil** set up his own monastery at Annesi. Basil emphasized the importance of monasteries being communities, rather than collections of solitaries. He advocated all monasteries should serve the poor in their localities, requiring all prospective members to sell at least some of their property to give to the poor. He saw the core business of monasteries as embodying the love of God in the flesh. In 370AD, he was made the Bishop of Caesarea. Basil used his position as a platform to denounce ‘simony’ (making money from religious activities) and ‘usury’ (making a profit from the poor by charging interest on loans), and to encourage the support of people suffering from drought and famine. Basil established an institute at the gates of the city, which was used as a poorhouse, hospital and hospice.⁵

In 500 AD **Benedict** moved to Enfide in the Simbrucini mountains about sixty kilometres outside of Rome. There he joined ‘a company of virtuous men’. While he was with them, Benedict’s understanding of spirituality was radically transformed. He was convinced that preaching ‘good news to the poor’ demanded grass-roots, hands-on solidarity with them. When the abbot of a nearby monastery died, the monks begged Benedict to become their leader. He declined, knowing their reputation as a quarrelsome community. But they persisted,



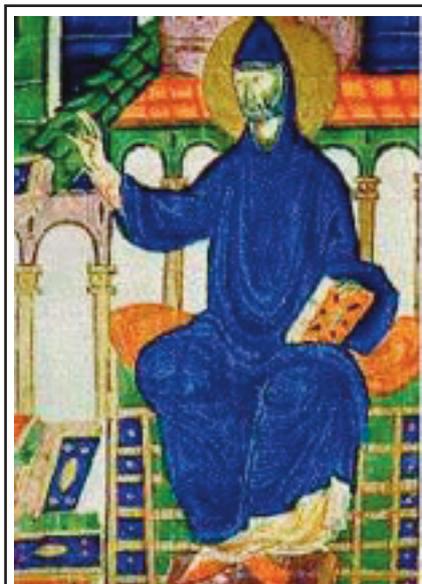
http://satucket.com/lectionary/Basil_Great.htm

and Benedict eventually became their abbot. The experiment proved to be a complete disaster. The monastery was more troublesome than Benedict had imagined it would be. The monks even tried to poison him.

Benedict’s painful experience caused him to think about the nature of Christian community. Over the years, he developed what he called a ‘little rule for beginners’ in Christian community — a 100-page primer

that later became known as the ‘Rule of St Benedict’. The word ‘Rule’ may sound harsh to our ears, but Benedict was determined to make sure there was ‘nothing harsh’ in his primer. Benedict’s Rule was not written just for monks and nuns, but for every person who wanted to practise the love of Christ in their ordinary, everyday life. It encouraged people ‘in all things’ — whether waking or sleeping, eating or drinking, studying or working — to ‘take care of things’. Benedict was convinced that the best way for people to learn to ‘take care of things’ was in a Christian community which encouraged a balance between individual responsibility and relational accountability. His Rule was intended to serve as a simple, practical guide to a healthy, holy, communal way of life for the members of the small Christian communities that Benedict slowly built up round Subiaco.

Benedict believed that the dynamics at the heart of a healthy, holy, communal way of life were *work* and *prayer*. He said people could not ‘take care of things’ unless they were prepared to work hard. They were unlikely to be prepared to work hard unless their work was suffused with prayer, because for nobles to voluntarily do manual labour alongside serfs was a revolutionary idea at the time. Benedict did not prescribe a particular type of work. He expected people to take up any work that was required. It was not *what* was done, so much as *how* it was done, that counted. Everything was to be done in a way that would care for others — ‘relieve the poor, clothe the



<http://www.osb.org/gen/benedict.html>

naked, visit the sick, help the afflicted, bury the dead' (Rule, 4) — and so demonstrate their love for Christ. 'Let all guests that come be received as Christ' (Rule, 53). 'Let the sick be served in deed as Christ Himself' (Rule, 36). In his Rule, Benedict said that for any community to be really viable, it needed stability and order. To enhance stability, Benedict encouraged people to commit themselves to a particular community for life.

To ensure order, Benedict encouraged the people in a community to elect their own abbot and to then submit themselves to his leadership — with the proviso that every abbot's decisions would be subject to public scrutiny and to open debate by all the members of the community on all matters of importance. Benedict's advice to an abbot was clear and direct. 'It beseemeth the abbot to be ever doing some good for his brethren, rather than to be presiding over them. He must be sober and merciful, ever preferring mercy to justice, that he himself may obtain mercy. Let him keep his own frailty ever before his eyes, and remember that the bruised reed must not be broken. Let him study rather to be loved than feared' (Rule, 64). Benedict died in 543AD. He didn't know it at the time, but his 'little rule for beginners' — embodying ideas of 'a written constitution, an elected authority limited by law and the right of the ruled to review the legality of the actions of their rulers' — would become a critical catalyst for the development of 'due process'.⁶

Aidan arrived in Northumbria in 635AD. He set up his base on Lindisfarne or the Holy Isle. Lindisfarne was isolated and protected — the perfect place for a monastery. It had a causeway connecting it to the mainland, which appeared twice a day at low tide, so the monks could travel back and forth on their missionary journeys. Aidan established an Irish-style monastery of round huts, a communal meeting place and a small church. The monks developed a routine of prayer and study.

In preparation for their mission trips among the English, the Irish monks invested a lot of time in learning the English language.

Oswald not only helped the monks learn the language, but also accompanied them on their trips as an interpreter. Aidan's approach to mission was simple. He walked round the countryside and chatted with the people whom he met along the way. Where people showed some interest, Aidan sent his monks to regularly visit their villages and form small local Christian communities.

Aidan was so committed to the importance of walking and talking with people, that when the king gave him a horse to help him on his travels, Aidan promptly gave the prize steed to the next beggar he met who asked for alms. The king, by all reports, was furious that Aidan had given away this expensive gift. But Aidan reprimanded him, saying that as far as he was concerned, people were more important than presents. Not surprisingly, Aidan developed a great reputation among the English for his integrity and generosity. According to witnesses, Aidan was 'indifferent to the dignity of a bishop, but influencing all men by his humility'. He 'delighted in distributing to the poor whatever was given him by the rich men of the world'. Aidan used the gifts of money he was given to ransom people sold into slavery.

Aidan died in 651AD.

As a result of Aidan's witness 'many Northumbrians, both noble and simple, laid aside their weapons, preferring to take monastic vows rather than study the art of war... He and his followers lived as they taught — namely a life of peace and charity...'⁷

Francis Bernadone was born in Italy in 1182 AD. His father called him 'Francesco' after a trip to France. And the 'little Frenchman' was brought up on romantic French ballads sung by travelling troubadours. The son of a wealthy merchant, Francis led a cavalier life in Assisi until, in his early twenties, he fought in a battle against a neighbouring town, was captured and incarcerated. This was to prove a turning point for Francis.

Following his release Francis gave away his horse, his armour, and his weapons. His father, exasperated over Francis's prodigality with family property, organised a



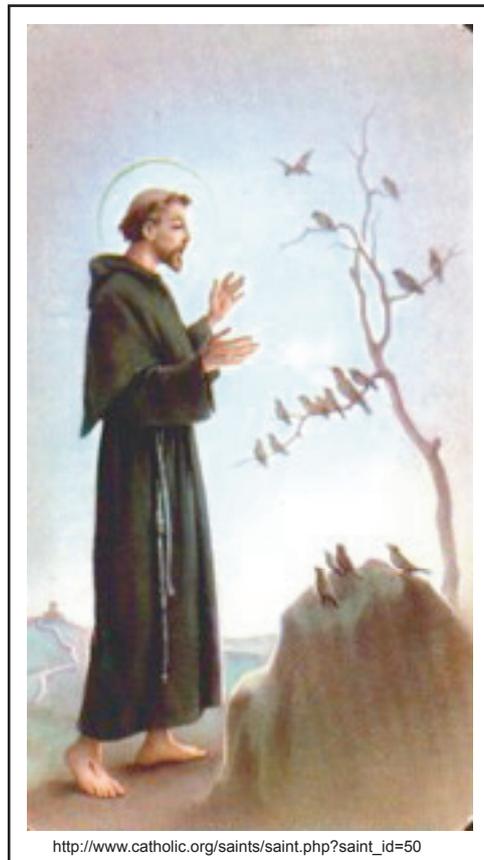
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aidan_of_Lindisfarne

meeting with the bishop to pull his son into line. But it backfired. Francis renounced his family, and his family's property, altogether. He gave back everything his family had given him, including the clothes he was wearing at the time. Francis stood there naked as the day that he was born. Then he turned to his father and said: 'Until now I have called you father, but from now on I can say without reserve, 'Our Father who is in Heaven' — I place my confidence in Him.'

Francis decided to spend some time living as a hermit beside an old church in San Damiano. While there, Francis heard a voice saying, 'Rebuild my church'. Francis responded by repairing the ruins of the church in San Damiano, then set about the task of reforming the life of the church throughout Italy. Francis approached the task of renewal — not as a legislator — but as a juggler! He aspired to be like one of the jugglers who accompanied the troubadours, drawing the crowds, so they could listen to the music of the heart the musicians played. As *Le Jongleur de Dieu* (a 'Juggler for God'), Francis wanted to travel from town to town like an entertainer, without a penny to his name, introducing people to *joie de vivre* (the 'true joy of living').

Thousands of people responded. And Francis pointed them to the Sermon on the Mount as the simple gospel imperative. For he longed for them to model the life of Jesus in the world. Remarkably, considering his views, Francis did not rage against the opulence of medieval society. Ever the romantic, he tried to woo people away from the trappings of power, and get them to fall in love with the lovely 'Lady Poverty'. For him, poverty was not an end in itself. People needed to joyfully embrace poverty in order to follow Jesus.

In 1210, Francis obtained approval from Pope Innocent III for a simple rule dedicated to 'apostolic poverty'. He called the order the 'Friars Minor', and this band of 'Little Brothers'



http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=50

followed the example of their founder in caring for the poor. In 1212, Clare — a wealthy friend from Assisi who, like Francis, had given all her wealth to the poor — started a sister order to the brothers, known as 'the Poor Clares'.

At this time, many Christians understood mission in terms of crusades — slaughtering as many Muslims as they could — in the name of the Lord. Francis not only refused to take up weapons himself, but traveled to Egypt where the crusaders were fighting, and begged them to lay down their swords. When they wouldn't listen to him, Francis crossed the lines at Damietta, to talk with the 'enemy' sultan, Mele-el-Khamil, telling him about the 'Prince of Peace', and trying to broker a peace deal 'in His name.'

While Francis was overseas, disputes arose among the Friars. A Vicar-General was appointed to take control of the order, and a new set of rules were instituted which changed the character of the movement. Francis retired to a hermitage on Monte Alvernia where he died in 1226AD.⁸

Nilus Sorsky was born in Russia in 1443 AD. At an early age Nilus, named after an early church father, joined the famous Russian Orthodox monastery of St. Cyril of Belozersk at White Lake. Very sincere about his faith, Nilus quickly became disillusioned with the corruption in the White Lake monastery. So, as an able scholar, he obtained

permission to study at the revered Russian Orthodox monastery on the Holy Mountain of Athos in Greece. Nilus made the most of this time at Mount Athos. He was particularly interested in the traditional practice of Christ-centred contemplative prayer as a discipline of the heart. Nilus also studied the early church fathers. He wrote: 'I lived like a bee flitting from one fine flower to another in order to know the garden of life'.

Nilus was particularly drawn to the writings of Basil of Caesarea and his ideas about intentional Christian community. He took every opportunity he could to visit other

monasteries round the Mediterranean, looking for communities based on the ideas of the early church fathers.

On his return to Russia, he had to stay at the White Lake monastery for a while, but as soon as he could, he moved as far away as possible. He found a place in a swampy region of wilderness near the River Sora, where he established his own simple, unpretentious Christian community.

His 'Christian community' stood in stark contrast with the 'Christian civilization' of the day. By the end of the fifteenth century, the church in general, and monasteries in particular, had become very large, powerful institutions. The political power of the feudal state was reinforced by the church hierarchy. As much as one-third of all the available arable land in Russia was controlled by the church, mainly through large monasteries. One monastery — the St. Sergius Monastery of the Trinity — had 100,000 peasants cultivating estates in fifteen provinces.

Nilus set up his monastery as the antithesis of this. He and his monks deliberately set aside any quest for power or acquisition of property. They lived as simply as possible, owned no large tracts of land and employed no peasants as labour. They worked humbly with their own hands to support themselves.

For most of the time, Nilus lived his life quietly with his monks at Sora. But from time to time, as a respected scholar, Nilus was asked to attend church synods and speak on the issues under consideration. When he did, Nilus strongly critiqued the church hierarchy's lust for power and the trappings of power. He called on the church to give up its Machiavellian political ambitions, and give away its large monastic landholdings, its jeweled icons and its gold and silver sacramental chalices. Nilus challenged his listeners to remember that 'the primary responsibility of a Christian is to be... as kind as possible.'

Nilus' community was organized to encourage personal liberty in the context of communal responsibility. Nilus did not

set himself up as an authority figure in the monastery, but simply made himself available to the other monks as a fellow traveler on the holy journey. Each monk was encouraged to seek God's will in their own way as part of a company dedicated to following the scriptures. Nilus always pointed to Jesus as the example 'for us all to follow', individually and collectively.

In 1490, Nilus was asked to attend a council convened by the church to decide the fate of a group of heretics known as the 'Judaizers' — a group of people seeking to re-establish the practice of Jewish rites in the Christian church. They were also critical of the growing wealth of the church, and called for the church to repent, empty itself of its pretentiousness and return to a spirituality of simple, dedicated service. Joseph, the abbot of the monastery at Volokolamsk, advocated that the Judaizers be condemned as heretics, arrested and burned alive. He justified his appeal on the grounds that Russia was a

Christian state and, in so doing, would be defending Christian civilisation.

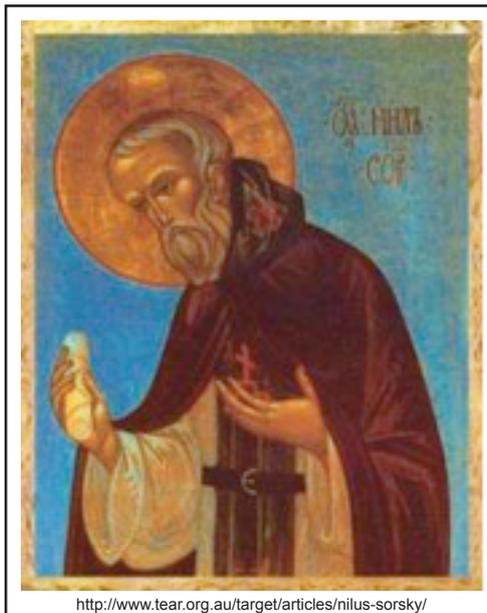
Nilus publicly opposed Joseph, arguing that only God was in a position to judge a person's relationship with him, and that no one else, be they an archbishop or an abbot, had a right to judge. Nilus said that if anyone was concerned for their souls, they should admonish them by their own example. He steadfastly refused to condone the use of corporal punishment, torture and execution by ecclesiastical

or civil authorities under any circumstances, advocating clemency and charity as 'more becoming to Christians'.

It was only after Nilus' death in 1508 AD that Joseph was able to begin his persecution of the Judaizers again — burning their leaders alive and throwing their followers into prison. As a result of his courageous stand, Nilus had been able to restrain the reactionary forces of the church and state for nearly twenty years.⁹

New Monastics

When the New Monastics emerged is difficult to date accurately. 'Some communities



<http://www.tear.org.au/target/articles/nilus-sorsky/>

now identified with new monasticism have been in existence since the 1970s and 80s. Other communities - such as the Simple Way - were formed in the mid-90s.'

The terminology of New Monasticism is thought to have been developed by Jonathan Wilson, in his 1998 book called **Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World**. Wilson was building on ideas of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. Noting the decline of local community that could sustain the moral life, MacIntyre ended his book **After Virtue**, by voicing a longing for "another St Benedict." By this he meant someone in the present age to lead another renewal of morality and civility through community. Wilson identified with that longing in his own book, but outlined a vision to carry it forward within the Christian tradition'.¹⁰

Any reflection on monasticism must begin with an acknowledgement of the enormous contribution that monastics have made to church, to mission and to civilization. But no one would suggest that this contribution would place monasticism above criticism.

Critique of Monasticism

Let me begin my critique of monasticism with a couple of reflections that come from people who have observed the unhelpful role monasticism has played in other religions. A Confucian critique of monasticism insists there is no basis for monasticism in the Confucian tradition. It asserts monasticism encourages the 'unnatural renunciation of pleasure', 'un-filial self-immolation', 'anti-family celibacy' and 'withdrawal from (and opposition to) social structures' – all of which are contrary to the Confucian tradition.¹¹

A Buddhist critique of monasticism is based on the fact that there is a tendency for monastics to see 'monastic ordination as the act by which one becomes a truly committed Buddhist'. They tend to suggest that one can only become a 'truly committed Buddhist' is by becoming a monastic. But Sangharakshita says that a 'truly committed Buddhist' finds their refuge 'in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha' - not in the monastery.¹²

One of the most famous Christian critiques of monasticism was by Erasmus.

Erasmus, who had been educated in a monastery, wrote to a friend saying; 'Monastic life should not be equated with the virtuous life. It is just one type of lifea life for which I was averse both in mind and body: in mind, because I shrank from ceremonies and was fond of liberty; in body, because my constitution was not adapted to such trials.'¹³ In 1509, Erasmus wrote **In The Praise Of Folly** as a full-frontal attack on monasticism. Erasmus argued that monasticism was based on 'man-made' vows and that Christians should make only one vow – 'the first and only vow we take in baptism – not to man, but to Christ.'¹⁴

"We need to critically reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the way these saints lived their lives - and embrace their mysticism but eschew their monasticism."

Following on from Erasmus, in 1521 Luther wrote his attack **On Monastic Vows**. Luther condemned monastic vows as 'works'. He attacked the vows of poverty and celibacy, saying they should be voluntary not mandatory. And he attacked the vow of

obedience saying we are called by Christ to serve one another not just 'one' person - an abbot.¹⁵

Jonathan Wilson called for a 'New Monasticism' in contrast to the 'Old Monasticism.' He said that the New Monasticism should be characterized by four distinctives:

(1) 'It will be "marked by a recovery of the *telos* of this world" revealed in Jesus, and aimed at the healing of fragmentation, bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Christ; (2) it will be aimed at the "whole people of God" who live and work in all kinds of contexts, and not create a distinction between those with sacred and secular vocations; (3) it will be disciplined, not by a recovery of old monastic rules, but by the joyful discipline achieved by a small group of disciples practicing mutual exhortation, correction, and reconciliation; and (4) it will be "undergirded by deep theological reflection and commitment," by which the church may recover its life and witness in the world.'¹⁶

It sounds good which is why there is so much enthusiasm about the New Monasticism.

Certainly we need to recover our sense of purpose and redouble our resolve to follow

in the footsteps of Jesus undergirded by deep theological reflection and action. And we can learn best how to do this from monastics like Basil, Benedict, Aidan, Francis and Nilus. However, I think we need to critically reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the way these saints lived their lives - and embrace their mysticism but eschew their monasticism.

I believe we should resist the call to pursue renewal through monasticism for ten reasons:

1. It has no biblical basis.
2. It encourages self-abnegation.
3. It requires subordination to a hierarchy.
4. It typically involves separation from the community.
5. It principally involves imposition on the community.
6. That imposition may involve exploitation of the community.
7. The 'monastic cycle' tends to move from devotion to decadence.
8. Monastic organization makes monastics susceptible to appropriation.
9. Monastic isolation makes monastics vulnerable in times of persecution.
10. Last but not least, monasticism is totally unnecessary as a means of renewal.

1. Monasticism has no biblical basis.

It is clear that when Jesus chose his path, he had four options – the 'pietist' Pharisee option, the 'realist' Sadducee option, the 'activist' Zealot option and the 'monastic' Essene option - and he specifically and repeatedly rejected each of these options - including the 'monastic' option. Christ did not call his disciples to form a special holy order based on a rule, circumscribed by regulations, characterized by a daily rhythm of religious rituals monitored, managed and controlled by spiritual hierarchs.

2. Monasticism encourages self-abnegation.

Jesus encouraged his disciples to break with family bonds which domesticated them, and to be willing to lay down their lives for the sake of the gospel (Matt.10.37-39). But Christ did not encourage 'unnatural renunciation of pleasure', 'un-filial self-immolation', or 'anti-family celibacy' like many monastics do. He said the greatest commandment was to love God with your whole heart and 'to love your neighbour as yourself'. (Matt.22.38)

3. Monasticism requires subordination to a hierarchy.

Erasmus said 'the first and only vow we take in baptism (is) not to man, but to Christ'. And Christ expected his disciples to follow his example - and to serve others as he did. (Matt.20.28) He explicitly forbade his followers to use anyone else's willingness to serve as an opportunity to exercise control over others - as monastics - old and new - typically do. (Matt.20.25-27) Rather, Christ came to abolish all hierarchies - even his own - by transforming his relationship with his disciples from 'servants' into 'friends'.(John 15.15)

4. Monasticism typically involves separation from the community.

One of the major reasons given by New Monastics for the emergence of their new orders is to promote and support 'relocation to the abandoned places in the Empire' like the Old Monastics did. Which is great. We could do with more people like Basil in 'Cappadocia'. However, the very nature of monasticism separates monastics from the communities in which they relocate and works against the process of incarnation they are committed to. Monasticism creates high caliber cadres of mission 'for the people' - not 'of the people'.

5. Monasticism principally involves imposition on the community.

Chanequa Walker-Barnes, in her article, *My Struggle with the New Monasticism*, says 'There's a certain multiple personality disorder in New Monasticism. On the one hand, there is sincere valuation of racial reconciliation, commitment to diverse communities, and willingness to hear the voices of people of color (hence, the invitation extended to an outsider like me to participate in this conversation). On the other, when people of color are invited to be part of New Monastic communities, it's on pre-established terms. That is, the communities in which you live are not of our making. People of color are not unaccustomed to living in multifamily households. For many of us, the idea of shared space is fraught with loaded memories, including traumatic ones. Consequently, many of us will never be attracted to the structural conditions' of the New Monasticism.¹⁷

6. In monasticism imposition may involve exploitation of the community.

Voltaire saw monastics as 'parasites' living off the industry of the lay populace.¹⁸ As we have noted in Nilus' story, by the end of the fifteenth century, monasteries in Russia had become very large, powerful, social

institutions. The political power of the feudal state both supported and was buttressed by the church hierarchy. It was estimated that as much as one-third of the available arable land in Russia was controlled by the church through large monasteries. In fact, at one stage one monastery – the St. Sergius Monastery of the Trinity - had 100,000 peasants cultivating the estates it ran in 15 provinces.¹⁹

7. In the 'monastic cycle' devotion and discipline tends to move to decadence.

Though some would argue St. Sergius was an exception rather than the monastic norm, Gordon Cosby argues that 'groups organized around devotion and discipline tend to produce abundance, but ultimately that very success leads to... decadence.' Cosby calls this historical pattern 'the monastic cycle'. Cosby says this cycle can be seen repeated again and again in monastic movements from the Dominicans through to the Jesuits. And over time even the abbots of St. Benedict became 'unenterprising, upper-class parasites'²⁰

8. Monastic organization makes monastics susceptible to institutional appropriation

The patriarchal, hierarchical, and traditional organisation of most monastic movements make monastics vulnerable to the institutional ecclesiastical appropriation of their order. As we have noted in Francis' story, he turned his religious movement into a religious order. He traveled to Rome and negotiated with the Pope for permission to organise his Friars Minor as an 'apostolic religious order'. When Francis opposed the Pope's call for a Crusade and traveled to Egypt to persuade the Crusaders to lay down their arms, the Pope appointed a Vicar-General to take control of his order and institute a revised set of rules which were more suitable to the Pope's requirements. Thus Francis was displaced from his own order, the Franciscans were co-opted by the church and the Friars Minor became a tool that the church was later able to use in persecuting heretics during the inquisition.²¹

9. Monastic isolation makes monastics vulnerable in times of persecution

There is protection in being part of community. But monastics tend to see themselves as 'missionaries' to the community rather than as 'members' of the community and are seen by the community as such. So during times of persecution, monastics are 'sitting ducks'. The Nestorians, who took the gospel as far as Afghanistan, Tibet and China, were wiped out almost completely because their monastics lived apart from their communities and were easily identified and destroyed by those who were inimical to Christianity.²²

10. Last but not least, monasticism is totally unnecessary as a means of renewal.

I would like to suggest a New Monasticism is totally unnecessary. Everything Jonathan Wilson says that we need to do in order to recover our sense of purpose and redouble our resolve to follow in the footsteps of Jesus undergirded by

deep theological reflection and action could be accomplished through a New Methodism rather than a New Monasticism.

It is the mysticism rather than the monasticism of the monastics that we should embrace. We need to practice action-and-contemplation as members of our communities. We need to practice a spirituality of compassion - methodically embodying the radical be-attitudes of Christ as ordinary people - alongside ordinary people - in our ordinary every day life.

Having said what I disagree with in Monasticism, I recognize God's delight in using those whom I disagree with. No doubt God is using many Monastics more than me.

(Endnotes)

1 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monasticism

2 wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

3 www.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/about_glossary.html

4 www.augustinianrecollects.org/glossary.html

5 Dave Andrews 'Basil of Ceaserea' in People Of Compassion Tear Melbourne 2009 p10-12

6 Dave Andrews 'Benedict' in People Of Compassion Tear Melbourne 2009 p16-18

7 Dave Andrews 'Aidan' in People Of Compassion Tear Melbourne 2009 p19-21

8 Dave Andrews 'Francis Of Assisi' in People Of Compassion Tear Melbourne 2009 p27-29

9 Dave Andrews 'Nilus Sorsky' in People Of Compassion Tear Melbourne 2009 p33

"Any reflection on monasticism must begin with an acknowledgement of the enormous contribution that monastics have made to church, to mission and to civilization."

10 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Monasticism
 11 'Critique of Buddhist Monasticism – Confucian' in Encyclopedia Of Monasticism by William M Johnston Vol 1 p 333
 12 'Critique of Buddhist Monasticism' Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia - Google Books Result by Christopher S. Queen, Sallie B. King - 1996 p 86
 13 'Critique of Christian Monasticism – Erasmus' in Encyclopedia Of Monasticism by William M Johnston Vol 1 p 339
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 16 Jonathan R. Wilson, Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's After Virtue (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 72-75.
 17 Chanequa Walker-Barne My Struggle with New Monasticism 09-18-2008 <http://www.sojo.net/blog/godspolitics/?p=2198>
 18 'Critique of Christian Monasticism in Encyclopedia Of Monasticism by William M Johnston Vol 1 p 341

19 Dave Andrews 'Nilus Sorsky' in People Of Compassion Tear Melbourne 2009 p33
 20 Philip Yancey 'Forgetting God' Christianity Today September 2004 Vo.48, No9, p104
 21 Dave Andrews 'Brother Suns And Sister Moons'- Engaging A New Dark Age Frank Publications Brisbane 2003 p13-14
 22 E H Broadbent The Pilgrim Church Pickering and Inglis London 1931 pp 74-83

- **Dave Andrews**, his wife Ange, and their family, have lived and worked in intentional communities with marginalised groups of people in Australia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal for more than thirty years. He now lives in a large joint household with his wife, children, grandchildren and others in an inner city community in Brisbane, Australia.
<http://www.daveandrews.com.au/>

MONASTICISM TO METHODISM

GORDON PREECE



[Gordon Preece wrote an article for the last issue of ON THE ROAD entitled "Everyone A Monk". Dave Andrews says, "My paper was not a critique of Gordon's. I hadn't even read it, when I wrote my paper." We thought it would be good to get Gordon's response to Dave's article because they share an interest in the topic.]

I do not feel a need to write a large response to Dave Andrews' paper as much of what Dave has said I agree with. Most of what I wrote was not so much an advocacy of monasticism or new monasticism as an historical description of old monasticism, lay monasticism and Anabaptism emerging out of lay monasticism. I had some material on the corruption of monasteries, the number of nobles who were its leaders etc, but left some of it out for space reasons. It is helpful to have a strong critique as the conference in January 09 was primarily about exploring connections between Anabaptism and new and old monasticism. We needed to establish some links and connections before critiquing.

Having said that, I should expand a bit and be more specific. I largely agree with Dave that a strictly structured form of monasticism is not found in Scripture. Despite my using JC O'Neill's work I note that he is known as a highly provocative NT scholar. His view is hardly a consensus position. He teases out some pre-monastic threads in the NT and maximises them - a bit like some used to make any references to gnosis or knowledge in the NT into evidence for a full-blown rather than an incipient movement then. On the other hand, there are certain emerging forms of community of goods, discipline regarding conflict and forgiveness - Mt 18, Jn 20:22-23, Acts 15

- that are later taken up in monasticism and Anabaptism. O'Neill fills in some interesting gaps but does tend to drive a truck through them.

The monastic decline and fall cycle is true of any human institution and the reason why the reformers referred to *semper reformanda*, 'always reforming'. As MacIntyre shows in *After Virtue* as well as his advocacy of a new and different Benedict to maintain the virtues, we need to maintain the constant argument that constitutes a live tradition as opposed to dead traditionalism. This argument is about the interpretation of classic, authoritative texts or founding traditions that stand in tension with the external goods of institutions (if anything is to last over time) that are always necessary but threaten to overwhelm the internal goods, virtues, character shaped by the original and ongoing story or tradition.

The tension between work and prayer, active and contemplative, lay and (mainly) clerical aspects of the Christian life and the monastic tradition is one requiring constant re-examination and reforming. The priesthood of all believers and lay vocations practised by the lay monastics, Reformers, Anabaptists, Methodists, Bonhoeffer and now new monastics in their own ways is critical. Even the Methodists (shame you couldn't say more

about them) - named after John and Charles Wesley's little group in Oxford and their methodical, even ascetical prayer practices, although I think their being forced to leave the Anglicans was the greatest disaster for Anglicanism, got corrupted.

Wesley foresaw its future corruption. His proverbial 'Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can. ... To all the people you can, As long as ever you can' which he practiced immaculately, living on the same amount as when he started but giving away thousands of pounds from book royalties (cf John Stott today), nonetheless led to upward mobility for working class people giving up the grog and fags and carrying methodical principles over from their prayer and chapel lives into their working and political lives. The Socialist historian EP Thompson, perhaps unfairly, blames Methodism for the corruption of the working class by giving them an almost monastic discipline which made them great factory fodder for the Industrial Revolution as they rigorously 'redeemed the time'. He forgets, as many do today, their equally great contribution to trade unions and to the early foundations of the Labor Party. But he does highlight a real danger.

The Primitive Methodists tried to maintain the original fervour once the control Methodist Conference was taken over by middle-class conservatism. Other Methodists became secularised social radicals. The Salvation Army emerged out of Methodism to once again connect with the working class and the poor. They themselves have been secularised; witness the way John Howard used them to divide and conquer the churches opposition to breaching and to silence churches on justice issues once they'd signed on to government 'charitable' contracts. Pentecostals emerged out of the same broad holiness tradition, connecting to the working class poor, uplifting them spiritually and materially.

The 'monastic' cycle goes on across the board, it is not exclusive to monasticism. What about Anabaptism? We need to be constantly reforming, practising the mixed life of activism and contemplation, in personal and communally discerning ways in company with the whole catholic church in time and space as 'it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (Acts 15:28).

- Gordon Preece,
preecegordon@hotmail.com

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON A CRITICAL REFLECTION

MARK BARNARD



I've been asked to write a response to Dave Andrew's 'A Critical Reflection On Monasticism - Old And New'. I really have to start with a preamble. Writing a critique of something Dave has written makes me feel like a school kid throwing something at their teacher while they are not looking; you know you shouldn't do it but it feels exhilarating! I first read *Christi-Anarchy* about ten years ago and it revolutionised my thinking – it was my *Politics of Jesus*; that book which takes all your preconceived notions and turns them upside down. I've been trying to recover ever since. Dave's impact on my faith has been seismic to say the least. So when he says something, I like to listen. I've just joined a 'New Monastic' community and am doing a little writing and thinking on the movement, so Dave's critique was received with some interest.

My early impressions of the literature around the movement are that it is fairly uncritical and overly generous. It paints with fairly broad brushstrokes and appears to gloss over some big issues. With these impressions in my mind Dave's critique was a welcome addition. Unfortunately though, his reflection doesn't quite work. It lacks the incisive razor edge that I've come to expect from Dave. Simply put, as a critique it is too broad and generalist to be especially helpful. Dave's attempt to condense and critique a 1700 year old movement with his ten point approach is overly ambitious and a wee bit simplistic. The issues are broader and far more complex than that. It is akin to saying, "I am going to critique the history of the Catholic church now – Here's my ten point summary."

The problem in responding to such a piece is that is difficult to find a way in. What exactly is Dave critiquing? Old or New? He states both, and

proceeds to make generalist comments about both, at the same time. The result is a rather schizophrenic affair which lumps two distinct phenomena in together. Obviously there is continuity and discontinuity between the two movements which needs to be established before discussing them meaningfully. Some initial questions that spring to my mind are: How monastic is New Monasticism? Can such groups be called Monastic in any real sense? Praying twice a day? Wow, doesn't that just make you a really good evangelical?

It seems curious to me that Dave begins with a greatest hits list of Monastic heroes with a mere paragraph devoted to the New Monasticism, then transitions into a collection of complaints about Monasticism as a whole. Wouldn't it have been better to give us a broader description of the new movement focussing on its strengths and weaknesses?

However it should be said Dave's ten points offer some useful food for thought in relation to thinking about Monasticism as a broader movement – even though they are fairly sweeping in scope. So I will attempt to comment on a few of his main critiques that could apply to the New Monastic movement.

It has no biblical basis.

This is perhaps the most uncritical of all Dave's statements. What does he mean by 'biblical basis?' If he means that the word 'monastic' is not mentioned in the Bible, or we have no 'proof text's' here, then maybe. But if we follow this logic then we are on shaky ground. Take the trinity for example – I haven't found that in the Bible.

In fact some Bible translators even tried to sneak some Trinitarian verses into 1st John at some point – which actually made it into the King James Version! (probably those pesky monks). Add to this, the doctrine wasn't finalised till the 4th/5th centuries and only then during state sponsored theological conferences presided over by Emperor Constantine! In spite of this the trinity remains a cornerstone of Orthodox faith. 'Biblical basis' is less about the exact words that the text uses and more about

the overall trajectory of our foundational story – otherwise we'd be stuck with genocide, silent women, and slavery... But I digress.

Back to Monasticism...If we think of called out communities, with rules of life and shared practices we don't have to look too far into the biblical story. The genesis of the monastic movement is all there.

Monasticism encourages self abnegation

That ascetic practice was and has been at the forefront of the Monastic movement is undisputed. This however needs to be seen in the light of Greek understandings of the body and pleasure etc to understand it, without making overly anachronistic criticisms. To imply that New Monastics suffer from this tendency is a little far fetched though. Gen X/Y can barely go without their daily cappuccino before they think the world is caving in. We could do with a healthy dose of self flagellation! I suspect Dave here is critiquing the direction within Monasticism rather than the present reality?

It requires subordination to a hierarchy

Historically yes. But in my interaction with groups in the New Monastic movement, there have been various leadership expressions; one has chosen consensus leadership, while another has a rotating 'convenor'. Perhaps these groups have been aware of the point Dave is making, or maybe this represents the post-modern tendency to pick and chose. What it also likely demonstrates is the multiple influences that New Monastic groups are drawing upon; as diverse as Catholic Worker, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, as well as Benedictine.

Monasticism principally involves imposition on the community.

This particular critique is one that is perhaps most relevant and one which I have had many conversations with others around. In fact recently our community talked of our 'white middle class educatedness' and what a challenge that presented in terms of people from different social standing as us joining our group. However I wonder if this is even

UPCOMING EVENT

Author and theologian Angie O'Gorman is our guest speaker at the next members' phone-chat on 12 August. Make a note of this now. Angie a well known advocate of non-violence and peacemaking will also tour eastern Australia.

See <http://www.anabaptist.asn.au/index.php?type=calendar&ID=1567>

the right question to be asking. Shouldn't we be thinking about how we may join with what others are already doing in their contexts rather than vice versa?

Monastic organisation makes monastics susceptible to institutional appropriation.

I find it difficult to think of any groups which are not susceptible to institutional appropriation! Are not all religious organisations subject to what Weber calls 'the routinisation of charisma' – in which a new movement gathers around a charismatic leader, only to rationalise and structuralise over time? This doesn't make a particular structure invalid, rather it means our structures need to be constantly reviewed and questioned in terms of their founding charism.

Monasticism is totally unnecessary as a means of renewal.

Of course it is. All our feeble, ill conceived ideas, inspired somehow by God's creative spirit are unnecessary in one sense. But in another sense they are all we have. We

see through a glass darkly. They are the best we have. I think it is important that we keep in perspective that New Monasticism is a way that God is working in the world, not the way. I think we get in trouble when we confuse *a* with *the*. We must resist the idolatry of ideology, and remember that whatever we do will be infused with both strength and weakness, good and bad. I've yet to find a Christian movement in my reading of church history that got it completely right (and yes, I'm including the Anabaptists here!).

Overall, while Dave may have kicked off a valuable and necessary dialogue, his critique has missed the mark. He attempts too much and as a result ends up achieving little. I would have hoped for something which was more specific and gave more focussed suggestions. At the very least I hope it may cause New Monastic groups to begin thinking more critically about the movement so that it may serve a broken and needy world in humility and compassion.

- Mark Barnard, Wellington, NZ

COMMUNITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, CONNECTION AND BELONGING
YOUNG ADULTS AND THE CHURCH

Moriah Hurst



One consistent way that I connect with young adults is over coffee. I get a lot more than a caffeine and sugar hit from these encounters. Many of the conversations highlight for me areas that young adults in general are longing for or struggling with. Here are a few of the issues I have been reflecting on.

A few weeks ago I went for coffee with a non-Christian young adult friend, I'll call her Trish. Trish worked for a couple of years in the health system of a Northern Territory Aboriginal community. As we talked about this time, Trish named how she longed for the kind of belonging and roots that she saw in places there. Trish wanted to fit in, to have her place within a long line of people and to belong to something with meaning far beyond herself. Our conversation went on and Trish expressed interest in my work and how I got there. Many young adults I meet either are turned off by the fact that I work for a church or are amazed that I will work within a religious institution and still ask questions of it. Trish fits into the latter category. She told me how many of

her friends are seeking a spiritual connection but that through their experimenting with other faiths many of them have wound up confused and not willing to commit to anything. I heard Trish talk about a trend with her friends that I have seen within my friendship groups. Young adults leave religious groups or churches to try to be authentic to what they believe – beliefs that they don't see the church holding to or living out. As we walked out to our bikes to head home Trish reflected further on this search for connection and meaning. Many of the parents of our generation grew up with black and whites being taught to them. Whether they embraced those norms or truths or rejected them, many parents have not taught or passed them on to their children. In an attempt to give their children freedom of choice they removed a foundation of spiritual or moral understanding. Many young adults, even from church families, are largely Biblically illiterate and are suffering disconnection, not by their own choices alone but from the religious reaction or rejection of

their parents. This only adds to the myriads of other choices that are piled upon us today. We have the freedom to choose in more ways than we can imagine and all of these choices become paralyzing.

As we parted Trish asked me if my church had a mentoring program that helped young adults sort through all of these questions and the barrage of choices. I started thinking about my Uni friends. One night at Uni, my friends and I got talking about calling, purpose and direction. Within our larger tradition (the Mennonites) there

was a history of strong elders telling people what to do with their lives. This direction from some elders went as far as telling people what to major in at Uni, what job they should take and where that should be, and even who they should marry. While my friends and I were glad that we no longer had such controlling leaders we mourned the fact that no one gave us strong advice on what to do. The pendulum has swung the other way and elders are scared to speak into the lives of young people. Here we were a bunch of young twenty-somethings with the world open to us and we had no idea which passions we should follow or how to sort it all out. We looked at each other and realised that we were willing to give our lives, we just didn't know what to give them to. One of the guys summed it up well when he said that "If someone walked in here today and said 'I see these gifts and skills in you and I think you should go and use them in this place and in this way' I would go". We all agreed that if someone would help us call out our gifts that we would be willing to drop everything to follow that one thing. This proved true several weeks later when that young man was approached by an older member of our church. This elder affirmed a few gifts in my friend and then said that he thought my friend should be working for Christian Peacemaking Teams in Colombia. Two months later my friend had put Uni on hold and was on a plane to Colombia.



At the Anabaptist conference earlier this year we saw an interesting shift in the median age of participants. I am used to going to church conferences where no one is within

25 years of my age. Yet this year at the AAANZ conference there were not only the old faithfuls who have been part of my life and this group since the mid '90s, but there was a large group of young adults my age and even some younger than me. These young adults were drawn to a group

that was talking about community and faith. As I sat and talked to my peers around the lunch table I expressed how grateful I was to not be the token young voice at the conference and I was surprised by their response. The young adults around the table began to talk of how much they appreciated being at a conference with people a generation older than them. They told me that they normally go to gatherings where there are all young adults asking the same questions and trying to figure out how to live out what they believe. These young adults were grateful to meet an older generation who had and were living it out. One person said "We need wise elders". This generation needs to hear the stories of those who have gone before. We need to know what it was like, to seek the wisdom of our elders and for these elders to grapple with us over how to live out faith now (even if they don't feel like wise elders, we still need to hear their voices!).

Somewhere between the AAANZ conference and my coffee with Trish, a young man, I'll call him John, came over to my house for a cuppa and a chat. John grew up as a Christian and went to a seminary for a year after undergrad, yet has many questions about faith and how we live it out. For now John is meeting with the Quakers for worship. Over our steaming cups we grappled with faith and our western context. We both have so many questions and the church doesn't seem ready

for them or willing to hear them. John ended up with the Quakers because they share his values of good food, good conversation, active lives of social justice, and when they gather for worship “they expect that God, in the Spirit, will show up”. How often do churches hold these things together: the doing or acting out of faith in daily lives and entering worship ready to be profoundly touched by a movement of the Spirit?

Young adults want accountability. They want community and to be connected to something spiritual and real. They want to belong and to hear the story that goes before them and that will be there after them. Young adults are asking hard questions and while they will rarely take easy answers, they acknowledge that there is mystery in life and in God. There are communities that are working well inter-generationally and are mentoring young adults in faith, I know this because I am the product of such a community. But, sadly, they are few and far between. The more that young adults are burned by lack of community, by missing accountability and mentoring, by

not seeing spiritual life and the actions of faith lived out together, by floundering around without wise elders to help them call out gifts and move them to action, the more they will shy away from religious institutions. They are longing for what church could be but they don't see it as what church is. Young adults hold a great potential for the future of the church but also present an enormous challenge. So what are we going to do?

- This article is a follow up from the 6 June AAANZ Teleconference chat with Moriah Hurst. Moriah is the youngest child of Mark and Mary Hurst. She grew up in Australia but returned to the USA to attend a Mennonite College and Seminary. Moriah specialises in youth and young adult ministry and is currently working for Canberra Baptist Church as one of their ministers and as the community coordinator for **Irene's Place: a house of discipleship and peace**. Moriah is a young adult herself and confesses that these are only a few out of a range of pressing issues when it comes to understanding young adults and their relationship to the church.

Book Review

GOD IS BACK

HOW THE GLOBAL REVIVAL OF FAITH IS CHANGING THE WORLD
JOHN MICKLETHWAIT & ADRIAN WOOLDRIDGE (THE PENGUIN PRESS, 2009)



This absorbing book, written by two very smart journalists of the *Economist* magazine, represents a massive rebuttal of the classical secularisation hypothesis, still accepted by opinion makers in the Western media and in many university departments, though now largely discarded by the sociologists of religion who dreamed it up in the first place. According to this theory, the relentless march of modernisation will see the steady decline and eventual demise of religion, especially in the public arena. God and modernity simply do not mix. As education, democracy, technology and material prosperity improve, the world will become progressively “disenchanted” and religion’s appeal will fade away.

The problem with this hypothesis is not only that it is demonstrably false, as this book attests, it is also responsible for leaving Western commentators and policy makers floundering to make sense of the

world we now live in, an intensely religious world that ought not to exist. Contrary to earlier reports, God has *not* exited from public life. Quite the contrary. God is back on the scene and, by and large, the authors argue, for the better, even considering the “new wars of religion” that have broken upon us.

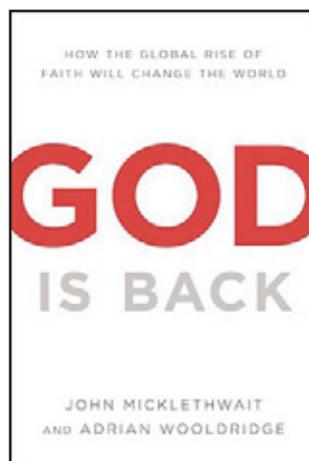
The book begins by tracking the current global revival of religion. The percentage of people claiming an attachment to the world’s big four religions has grown significantly over the past century. The expansion of Christianity, and especially of Pentecostalism or “renewalism”, has been particularly impressive. What is most telling however is the type of people who are embracing religion, the very persons who, according to secular theory, ought to be abandoning it in droves: young, technologically sophisticated, upwardly mobile, urban, well-educated, middle class – in a word, thoroughly modern – people.

This continuing vitality of religion should occasion no real surprise. What secularisation theory fails to reckon with is that human beings are innately religious or “theo-tropic” creatures; given the choice, most people choose to hold religious beliefs. Secularisation theory also fails to recognize its own cultural parochialism. It rests on the blinkered assumption that the European experience of secularisation is the norm for everyone else. But this is far from the case. For the majority of people in the non-Western world, religion has always been very important, and it continues to be so even as modernisation occurs. (Even in Europe, where the established churches have been in free fall for a long time, the religious vacuum has not gone unfilled. Various secular cults have functioned as religious substitutes, finding their most catastrophic expression in the 20th C secular religions of fascism, Nazism and communism).

The European experience is also markedly different from the *American* experience, and it is the American experience of relating religion and modernity, not the European one, that is being replicated around the globe. This is the central argument of the book. The authors describe America as “a three-hundred million strong refutation of the secularisation thesis that modernity was bound to destroy religiosity and push faith out of public life.” (131) Whereas the European path from the Enlightenment was marked by an overt hostility towards religion as a perpetual threat to political freedom and by a determined effort to restrict its influence in public life, the American path was characterized by a broad hospitality towards religion as a crucial guarantor of freedom and by a determination to ensure that the church is protected from the state every bit as much as the state is protected from the church.

The First Amendment to the American Constitution, the authors claim, represents one of the greatest paradigm shifts in the history of religious thought. It simultaneously forbids

the state to manipulate religion for its own ends by creating an established church while guaranteeing citizens the right to participate in public life on the basis of their religious convictions. Paradoxically it is precisely this separation of church and state, and the “godless” nature of the U.S Constitution, that accounts for the vitality of religious life in America today. In Europe, where the church historically has relied on state sponsorship, the results are depressingly different. There the church has been enfeebled by its dependence on political patronage, while political discourse has been almost totally secularised, root and branch.



The genius of the American solution rests on a single penetrating insight, well understood by the Founding Fathers. They recognised that religion is a dangerous and divisive reality, as the 17th century wars of religion had shown. But the problem is not with religion as such, but with the fusion of religion and political power. The only kind of power religion should exercise is the power of persuasion, not the power of political coercion.

Once liberated from its bondage to power, religion can survive only by winning the hearts and minds of its adherents. Freedom of conscience leads to freedom of choice, and freedom of choice leads to competition, and competition generates innovation and diversity, and diversity – or pluralism – is the distinguishing mark of modernity. Just as America has excelled at free market capitalism, so it has excelled at free market religion.

It is here that the authors discern the greatest competitive advantage modern Christianity has over contemporary Islam. Both religions aim to be global soul winners, and both work hard at spreading the word. But Islam’s profound discomfort with pluralism, its greater dependence on top-down power and state enforcement, and its deeply entrenched, and frequently violent, sectarianism (which is much worse than the Catholic-Protestant split is nowadays), mean

that Islam is less equipped to cope with the challenges of modernity than is Christianity. As the globalised world trends ever more strongly towards freedom of conscience and freedom of choice, including religious choice, Islam remains too wedded to mechanisms of external compulsion.

The above summary barely scratches the surface of this wide-ranging and informative book. Its central proposition – that religion is flourishing in the modern world (though not without violent convulsions), and that the most significant religious change of recent history is the shift away from state-sanctioned religion towards personal choice in matters of religious identity – seems wholly persuasive. The book maps the present landscape from a sociological and historical rather than a theological perspective, though a Christian theological account of the same phenomena could readily be given. After all, the twin tenets of the American Constitution which the authors laud so loudly – that religion must be a matter of individual conscience, and church and state must remain separate – were also key convictions of the Anabaptist Reformation. Even before the dawn of the Enlightenment, Anabaptist radicals insisted that only freely-given faith is genuine faith, and that all religious faith is fatally corrupted when it employs the power of the sword to achieve its ends. Who knows, but without the witness of the Radical Reformers against the Constantinian capture of the church, the paradigm shift accomplished by the framers

of the American Constitution might never have happened.

What of the future? The authors of **God is Back** may be right in suggesting that the American model of a non-established church, married to freedom of religious expression in a normatively secular public square, offers the best available model for relating religion to the conditions of modernity (though many Muslims may protest that such a model presupposes an essentially “Christian” concept of religion, and there are some Christian scholars, like David Ford, who commend the British “multi-stakeholder” approach to public life over the American separation of church and state). Be that as it may, even if America offers the best structural solution to the place of religion in the modern world, something more is needed to infuse the structure with a spirit of peace and goodwill. And the best place to look for that something, I believe, is the Anabaptist apprehension of the Christian gospel as, at one and the same time, a gospel of grace (Eph 2:8-9), that discloses God’s free gift of salvation apart from every human distinction, and as a “gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15), that announces the definitive conquest of hatred and violence in service of truth.

American religiosity is certainly vibrant and dazzling in its diversity, as this book documents so brilliantly. Yet it is still all too rare, within this diversity, to hear prominent religious voices publicly proclaiming the full political implications of the New Testament’s constant refrain: “grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ”.

- Reviewed by Chris Marshall, Wellington, NZ

Book Review

BORDERS & BRIDGES

MENNONITE WITNESS IN A RELIGIOUSLY DIVERSE WORLD

EDITED BY PETER DULA AND ALAIN EPP WEAVER (CASCADE PUBLISHING, 2007)



Much of the debate about engaging with religious diversity assumes that we are faced with only two options – exclusivism, retaining the integrity of a faith position, or a tolerant liberalism in which difference does not matter because we are all on different paths to the same religious end.

That account of things is wrong and there is lots of evidence that shows from the point of view of empirical lived reality to show that it is wrong.

Borders & Bridges: Mennonite Witness in a Religiously Diverse World provides a series of case studies that prove the point. The stories are simply and directly told largely

by those who have been engaged in the situations they describe. They served in long-term placements under the direction of local organisations and built on personal relationships.

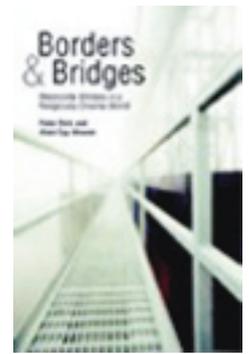
It is these long-term patiently wrought connections that open up the possibility of engagement across the borders of religious difference.

Interesting too is the fact of the seriousness of the faith commitment of a Christian tradition committed to peacemaking and visibly distant from the violence of the US

empire that has opened the doors to conversation. The story of the Mennonite Central Committee engagement with Iranian Shiites is a stunning example.

This is a challenging and moving collection of stories with a reflective theological postscript.

- **Reviewed by Doug Hynd, Canberra, AU**



Book Review

GETTING THE BLUES

WHAT BLUES MUSIC TEACHES US ABOUT SUFFERING AND SALVATION

STEPHEN J NICHOLS, BRAZOS PRESS, 2008

Stephen J Nichols has produced a fine piece of theology in a minor key, on what the blues teaches us about suffering and salvation.

This is a wonderful piece of work for someone like myself who has enjoyed musicians like B B King and has heard the tributes to musicians like Mississippi John Hurt by the younger generation of acoustic blues musicians like Eric Bibb but is only very vaguely aware of the roots of this musical tradition.

Nicholls proceeds with humility and respect. It is not his tradition and story. "But" he says "I can listen and I can try to understand."

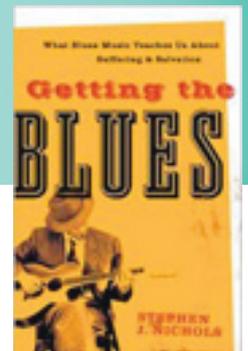
In that journey of trying to understand, Nicholls gives us some geography, history and biography of key figures in the history of the

blues. Out of this, he gives us a theological reading - in a minor key.

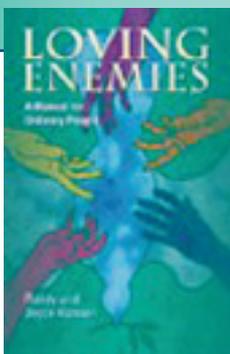
A theology in a minor key- or the blues for that matter - is no mere existential scream. In fact, a theology in a minor key sounds a rather hopeful melody. Good Friday years for Easter and eventually Easter comes. Blues singers, even when groaning about the worst of times, cry out for mercy; they know that, despite appearance, Sunday's coming. (p.15)

Nichols provides a useful discography for the beginner like me.

- **Reviewed by Doug Hynd, Canberra, AU**



NEW FROM CASCADIA PRESS



LOVING ENEMIES: A Manual for Ordinary People,

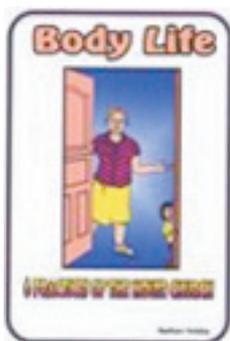
by Randy and Joyce Klassen
Like parents and grandparents everywhere, Randy and Joyce Klassen are deeply concerned about the state of the world in which their children and grandchildren

will be living. Will violence and wars escalate? Or will the world's peoples, including those in a United States so often involved in war, try a different way? Will even ordinary people

commit ourselves to selfless love? Will we strengthen and expand the reality of justice and peace in our world? This book is a manual for those of us ready to try.

Clearly the Klassens speak out of their own commitment to the nonviolent Way of Jesus and in hopes that others will join them in this commitment. At the same time, a unique feature of their book is their cordial engagement with Liberal, Conservative, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians as well as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Agnostics.

OIKOS RESOURCES



BODY LIFE

BY NATHAN HOBBY, OIKOS

This book is a compilation of articles that address basic essentials of relational ways of church. They are loosely based on John Howard Yoder's book, and hark back to the themes addressed at the AAANZ Conference in

Perth in 2007.

This is an excellent book to encourage new people joining fresh expressions of church. Some practices that have been either altered or lost are being recovered in ways in which New Testament Christians and early Anabaptists would have been familiar. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the giftedness of every believer, the open meeting, church discipline and discerning (the authority God gives the church to decide things in his name). This would be a good book for groups to read and discuss.

- Available through the OIKOS web site or directly through OIKOS. www.oikos.org.au or 0412 316 252

- Reviewed by Bessie Pereira, Melbourne

GOD'S RADICALS

BY PAUL WALLIS, OIKOS,
2009

This book is a compilation of articles written by Paul that appeared on the OIKOS Blog over a period of time last year. These are the stories of several saints through the ages who have not only been radical in their own time, and speak to house church/missional ways of church.

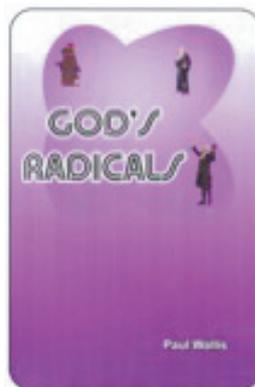
The style is down to earth and 'catchy'. A good book to give to your group to read to provide them with a sense of connectedness to the radical stream of church history of which they are a continuation. The headings will engage interest immediately. A great

little book of characters in church history brought to life for house churches.

- Available through the OIKOS web site or directly through OIKOS.

www.oikos.org.au or 0412 316 252

- Reviewed by Bessie Pereira, Melbourne



Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc.

The purposes of the Association are:

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

What is Anabaptism?

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

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

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