

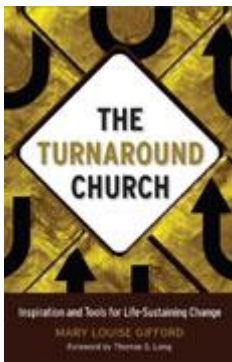
Mission Possible Ezine

March 2010

BOOKS

After a couple of ezines in which Books have barely featured, we have a whole bunch of them this month.

Turnaround Church: Inspiration and Tools for Life-Sustaining Change. Mary Louise Gifford.



This is the story of [Wollaston Congregational Church](#), a 130-year-old congregation that was once thriving in ministry, membership, mission, music, and money. Then the church slowly declined over a half a century and was considering closing its doors. The two dozen remaining members knew they had to change, but didn't know how. They risked their small amount of money and hired Gifford, a new seminary graduate, to be their full-time minister.

Changes in worship, stewardship, and priorities, combined with the congregation's resilience and Gifford's optimistic leadership, have now transformed this church.

Gifford addresses a wide audience, and shows church leaders they have options, and reason for hope. People in dying churches will find assurance they're still a part of the body of Christ. Clergy serving these struggling churches will discover tools and resources to help them guide change and will appreciate an inspiring story about a church that turned around in spite of the odds. While not a prescription for all churches, it's a call to make long-lasting, life-sustaining changes.

Alban Institute 2009

Find it hard to get books? Can we recommend the [Book Depository](#)? This is a UK-based online bookshop that sells all kinds of books, including Christian titles. Not only do they discount most books, but they also send them post-free – yup!- from the UK. This outdoes most other online bookshops by a mile, as postage can be a considerable part of the overall cost. And certainly works well while the exchange rate is so low.

You have to register with them (but that's free too), and I recommend you use the search box at the top of their screens rather than the one a little lower down. The top one seems to make more accurate hits.

[Procrastination](#) is attitude's natural assassin. There is nothing so fatiguing as an uncompleted task.
William James

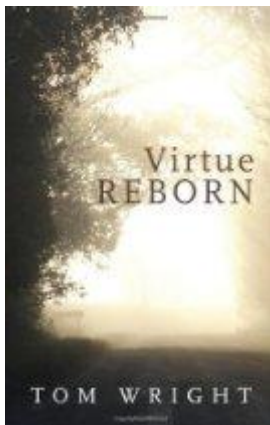
The [Devil Reads Derrida](#) - And Other Essays on the University, the Church, Politics, and the Arts by [James K A Smith](#).



'This whirling dervish of public philosophy generates enough intellectual energy to supply a middle-size city all by himself.' John Wilson, editor of Books & Culture.

Jamie Smith isn't just a leading philosophical or postmodern or Reformed theologian: he is simply a leading theologian. But his theology is as everyday as the neighbourhood, the movies, partisan politics, the university, and the street corner - and with a twinkle in his eye he shows us the lordship of Jesus in each place.

In this engaging work Smith grapples with the *Wild at Heart* phenomenon and the challenges of secularization, deals with sex and consumerism, and comments on creative works from **American Beauty** and **Harry Potter** to **A History of Violence** and the poetry of **Franz Wright**. Published by Eerdmans 2009



Bill Kinnon, *in reviewing a book by Tom Wright called [Virtue Reborn](#) (titled in the States, [After You Believe](#) - why Christian character matters)* notes late in his review:

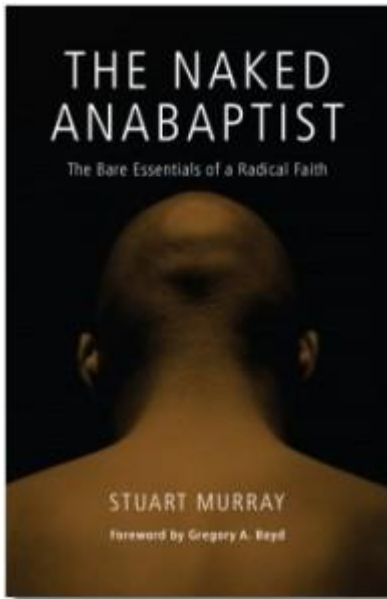
What a call for each of us as the church - to work at this life of character building - leading to virtues that will cause us to do the right thing, when the moment comes, as it will for each of us. Where and when only God knows, but when it truly matters will we know it in our bones, marrow, hearts and brains - and do the right thing, make the right decision, becoming Christ-like in our character. Are we the signposts and beachheads of God's future kingdom in this current world? It is not just a matter of "luck" (grace) but rather **preparation and work** and decision-making so that **doing the right thing becomes automatic**.

(The emphases are his.)

Kinnon sums up the book in this way: [Wright] does a masterful sweep of ethics and its various roots and streams, calling us back to working at Christian virtue - identifying and then avoiding the extremes of grace and works - those two polarizing positions of Christian history. In fact, the book gives us a broad enough and thoroughly orthodox way forward - to begin to become who we already are, in Christ - doing so framed within the church, communally, for the sake of the world, missionally.

An atheist is one who hopes the Lord will do nothing to disturb his disbelief.
~ Franklin P. Jones

Published SPCK Feb 2010



The Naked Anabaptist by Stuart Murray.

Anabaptist Christians have been around for almost 500 years. But what does Anabaptism look like when not clothed in Mennonite or Amish traditions? Writing from Great Britain, Stuart Murray peels back the layers to reveal the core components of Anabaptism and what they mean for faith in his context and ours. It's a way of following Jesus that challenges, disturbs, and inspires us, summoning us to wholehearted discipleship and worship.

Here are some quotes from the [Next Reformation blog](#) to give you an indication of Murray's approach.

“Post-Christendom is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian

convictions decline in influence.”

Post-Christendom includes the following transitions:

- * From the centre to margins: in Christendom the Christian story and the churches were central, but in post-Christendom these are marginal.
- * From majority to minority: in Christendom Christians comprised the (often overwhelming) majority, but in post-Christendom we are a minority.
- * From settlers to sojourners: in Christendom Christians felt at home in a culture shaped by their story, but in post-Christendom we are aliens, exiles and pilgrims in a culture where we no longer feel at home.
- * From privilege to plurality: in Christendom Christians enjoyed many privileges, but in post-Christendom we are one community among many in a plural society.
- * From control to witness: in Christendom churches could exert control over society, but in post-Christendom we exercise influence only through witnessing to our story and its implications.
- * From maintenance to mission: in Christendom the emphasis was on maintaining a supposedly Christian status quo, but in post-Christendom it is on mission within a contested environment.
- * From institution to movement: in Christendom churches operated mainly in institutional mode, but in post-Christendom we must become again a Christian movement.

Herald Press, March 2010 (Some another – ongoing- review of the book by [Ryan Dueck](#))

*Anxiety is nothing but repeatedly
re-experiencing failure in advance.
Seth Godin*

Leaders Who Last by *Margaret J. Marcuson*.

Notes from a review from Rowland Croucher. Here's one of the best little (150 pages) books on pastoral leadership with an American mainline church /Alban Institute flavour to emerge in the last decade.

They say every sermon/book should be summarizable in one sentence. Here's mine for this one: 'Your pastoral leadership style/conflicts can't be understood apart from your family-of-origin experiences; so be patient: most changes in a pastor's approach and a congregation's responsiveness will take time and sensitivity to that church's history as well.'

Margaret's a Baptist, but as a non-fundamentalist Baptist myself, I hasten to add that the people she quotes and the ideas she espouses indicate that she's a 'broad church Baptist' (yes, some of us do actually exist!).



Some of her (and her professional friends') wisdom:

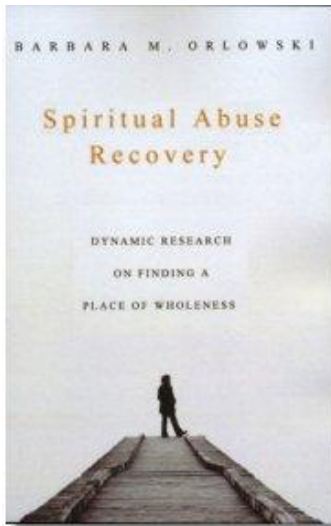
- When we are less dependent on the approval of others we can be more effective in our ministry (p. 6)
- Carrying other people, until we can't do it any longer, is the real source of burnout, not overwork (11). We can be the most help by giving people space to find creative solutions to their own struggles (17). Identify who in your family you were trained to rescue so as not to mistake legitimate professional helping with illegitimate family rescuing – which is inevitably tied to unhealthy ways of trying to feel good about oneself (18-19).
- Many clergy are oldest children: they learn early to over-function in relation to others, to take responsibility for them (34-5). Of course not all that we learnt from our families is negative. Ask: 'What gifts did your parents give you?' (36). An initial step in looking at our family story is to create a family genogram (37). And remember: the problems with parents is that they had parents (46).
- Clarifying your vocation: Where do I want to go? What energizes me? What future possibilities do I see? What legacy do I want to leave? Do I know what I love to do? Can I do more of it? What was my original thinking in going into ministry? If I had to write down my ministry purpose in one sentence right this minute, what would I say? (73).
- The person who desperately wants to be liked is never the most popular; the leader who desperately wants others to follow is not the most effective (76)
- Teresa of Avila's daily prayer: 'Let nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you; all things are passing, God never changes. Patient endurance attains to all things; who God possesses in nothing is wanting; alone God suffices' (110).

The excellent final chapter on personal spiritual disciplines includes such classical wisdom as: worship in different places and traditions, go outside, find a spiritual mentor, read

Scripture devotionally, not just for your sermon preparation.

At the end of each chapter are some very helpful discussion-starters. The ten questions to ask about your church's history are brilliant (32). I'd suggest this book as an excellent resource for your pastoral colleagues' support-group.

Alban Institute 2009



Spiritual Abuse Recovery: dynamic research on finding a place of wholeness, by *Barbara M Orlowski*.

What factors contribute to active Christians in ministry leaving their church and becoming exiting statistics? Every year dedicated Christian people leave churches because of spiritual abuse. The stories of people who left their home church because of a negative and hurtful experience paint a picture of a widespread occurrence which beckons consideration by church leaders and church congregants alike.

Spiritual abuse, the misuse of spiritual authority to maltreat followers in the Christian Church, is a complex issue. This book shows how people processed their grief after experiencing spiritual abuse in their local church and how they rediscovered spiritual harmony. Their spiritual journey shows how one may grow through this devastating experience.

This book offers a thoughtful look at the topic of spiritual recovery from clergy abuse through the eyes of those who have experienced it. It invites church leaders to consider this very real dysfunction in the Church today and aims to demonstrate a path forward to greater freedom in Christ after a season of disillusionment with church leadership.

Wipf & Stock Publishers (January 2010)

The [National Mission Blog](#) – also known as the Mission Resource Site – includes all the material in this ezine, and much more that we don't have room for. You can get the latest posts by email, or on an RSS feed.



The Church of Facebook: how the hyperconnected are redefining community, by *Jesse Rice*.

Some people think social networking fosters community. Others think online networking is superficial and competes with deep human interaction. Whichever side of the fence you're on, the Wi-Fi, worldwide movement is changing how we interact with others.

Jesse Rice believes that Facebook offers a profound look at our deepest needs. In his new book, he explores social networking and its impact on culture and the church.

"Facebook has become part of our lives, and we're just beginning to learn how to be human in it. Online, we have power over how we express ourselves. You can take the time to choose your words carefully, edit your responses, PhotoShop a picture until you get it just right. Real conversations, real relationships don't allow that. They include awkward silences."

[Read a review by Brian Orme.](#) Read [the first chapter](#).

**I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones ~
John Cage**

MENTAL HEALTH

[Paul Fromont writes](#) – An area that has long interested me is male spirituality, growth toward wholeness, and spiritual formation. This interest lies at the intersection of spirituality, psychology, mythology and depth psychology. It was therefore a fascinating (yet sad) experience, yesterday (Thursday 4th March 2010), to listen in on a [RNZ interview](#) about adult males and suicide in NZ, especially after relationship breakdowns. **It touched on a range of issues including family court, males frequent inability to connect with the deep places in their lives, and frequent inability to recognise and name their feelings, the importance of men's groups etc**

You can have a listen [here](#). Scroll down for the Mp3.

If you're a New Zealander perhaps it's time to start lobbying / writing to your MP to encourage the government to adequately fund support services and research into male mental health and well-being...

The usual mantra is to 'try harder'. Trying harder is impossible when you're already trying as hard as you can.

But you can always try *different*. [Seth Godin](#)

If you can track it down, well worth a look is a fantastic award-winning 2008 Australian movie ([one of my top 10 films watched in 2009](#)) called [Men's Group](#). It's directed by Michael Joy. It will be compulsory watching at any future male and spirituality workshops I might facilitate. It's an important film at so many levels.

MINISTRY



[Pastors aren't Prophets](#) - some unsolicited advice for newly-minted ministers - is an excellent post by [Rick Floyd](#).

In it he discusses (amongst other things) the need for ministers to gain the respect of their congregation by being a faithful pastor to the people day in and day out - only then can you speak prophetically to them, and have them listen.

You need to be aware that in spite of all our calls for self-care and avoiding burnout, a minister's job is never going to consist of a forty-hour week, with no evening/night calls or weekend work. It's truly a full-time job...though that doesn't mean you mustn't take any time off. As he writes:

One of the modern heresies (but by no means the only one) of the contemporary mainline church, is that you can have something akin to a normal 40 hour a week professional life and be a faithful pastor. It isn't true. A pastor's life, and the life of the pastor's family is necessarily involved in the community of their congregation in season and out of season. Sometimes, even often, it is wonderful; other times it isn't. That's the way it goes. It isn't the Canyon Ranch spa. I often say being a pastor is the best vocation there is, but perhaps the worst job. If you are not called to it, it is something you really don't want to do.

And a little later:

One of the things I learned was that you have to love your congregants, even the unlovable, of which there are far too many, and who take up a good deal of your time. If and when you find yourself loving them, you know you are on your way to really being a pastor. Some of them you will just never learn to love, and you have to turn them over to God, who does.

Floyd probably packs more wisdom into this one article than you'll find in many a day. Essential reading.

**Never attribute to malice
that which is adequately
explained by stupidity.
*Robert J Hanlon***

MISSION



[Mark Berry Reflects on the Challenges of New Imagination and Fresh Expressions](#)

“...Graham Cray told General Synod last week that a crucial factor in the spread of fresh expressions has been 'a new imagination about the form or shape of church'. He is right. We have seen over the last half decade an exploration emerge which concerns not just the stylistic aspects of our gatherings - music, dress, structure, location, etc - but concerns the very substance of what it is to be church. The question is, if this is good, how deep are we willing to go?”

At the heart of the matter is how we have sought to be community and how this journey has led us into a new romance with the God who is by nature community. We have had a new encounter with God as Trinity, not a hierarchical Trinity with God the Father as the CEO, Jesus as middle management and the Spirit on the factory floor, but with the Trinity as the root of radically mutual community ... of the meal table, not the boardroom table!...”

A colleague of mine from Lichfield Diocese, Revd Richard Moy, challenged Synod why it 'locked its trainee clergy away for three years in a place full of other Christians'. I agree. We need to reflect on how we train our leaders, but have we got to go deeper? In this changing world, which will force our church to change, is it time to release leadership, to give it back to communities, to create a new way for sustainability which does not rely on a professional body but on equipping and resourcing communities to lead themselves?

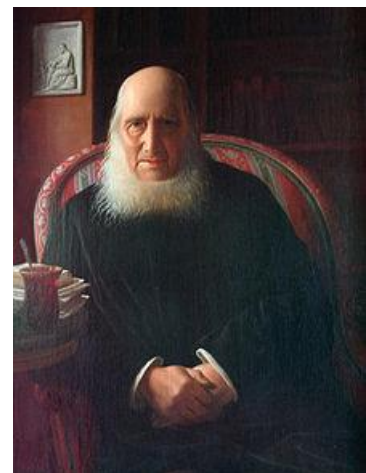
You can read his whole post [here](#).

The following is an abridged version of an article in the [Canadian Rural Church Network newsletter](#), March 2010 by Dr. William Ramp, Rural Sociologist, University of Lethbridge. It's worth reading for both its views on community and rural life.

[Nicolaj Frederik Grundtvig](#) (1783-1872) was a Danish clergyman who had some original ideas about Church, community and education.

Church

At the time, the Christian Church was shaken by controversy over the source of its truth. Grundtvig's answer was that the Christian faith is not grounded in “dead books”, rules, or habits; nor in the vagaries of individual emotion or thought. It is constantly renewed in the “living word” of song, speech and prayer, every time the Christian community gathers, and especially at baptism and communion. *Christianity must be brought to life in the gathering of its people.*



Community

Grundtvig stressed the importance of *community* in secular life. He was deeply involved in the rural co-operative movement, and urged the Danish people to search for and build their character on a shared sense of their history. But he was no narrow nationalist: he argues that people with a sure sense of their shared past could more effectively build community among themselves and with the rest of the world.

Learning For Life

Education should be “for life”, not against it; should be a living process, not dry academics or dull recitation; and should involve the whole person. In the schools he envisioned students and teachers would live together for periods of time, exploring together issues and ideas that mattered to their lives. In these schools, *singing and celebration and the arts* would have a central place. More technical or academic subjects would be approached in the spirit of life, instead of reducing life to technical formulae and qualifications.

Here are some pointers for rural community revitalization today that stem directly from Grundtvig’s vision:

- ◆ It is easy to become discouraged about the lack of control that rural communities have over the forces that shape and sometimes dismember them. Focus on the signs of life in a community, wherever they may be found, and always foster that life.

- ◆ Bring people together in ways that lend themselves to what might be called the “living word” – the voices of people speaking their life experience.

- ◆ Community life is fostered by regular occasions for celebration in which all members have a place, a role and a voice.

- ◆ We should focus more on sources of vitality in community organizing and less on identifying sources of authority. The cult of expertise needs to be replaced by an encouragement of and love for practical learning.

- ◆ Practical learning needs to be seen as learning which enables us, at any moment, to live a “plain and active, joyful life on earth” ... not as learning which merely equips us to compete against and put others down.

What we need above all is to re-learn ways of finding and communicating our deepest concerns, our relations to others, and the history of their development. Community is not so much formed by organizational charts as something told-into-being through our stories. For Grundtvig, and also for us, life and voice must go together.

Old people and the digital age? For some the two just don't go together. Put a computer in front of an old person and they have no idea how anything works. Or so the theory goes.

But there's another approach, one that Marty Bullis talks about in a [brief article on the Leadership Journal online](#).

Marty works as a chaplain in a Presbyterian nursing home, and wherever he goes, he takes his laptop with him. Using pictures familiar to people who have Alzheimer's, he's been able to improve some of their ability to remember; using hymns in large print, he's been able to get some people to sing along; and



he's even got some of the old men 'driving' on the computer with simulated driving games. An innovative approach to chaplaincy. Photo by [Pedro Ribeiro Simoes](#)

**"Talent develops in tranquility,
character in the full current of
human life." Goethe**

Alan Roxburgh is a name that turns up in these ezines fairly frequently, but we haven't previously mentioned the [videos on Roxburgh Missional Network site](#).

The focus of these is '**moving back into the neighbourhood**' and the two dozen or more videos look at different aspects of this. The softly-spoken Australian (so soft I had to turn the computer's sound up), **Tim Carey Holt** features in five of them, and gives as good an idea of what the focus is as anyone. He tells a story in the first of his videos about being in a Los Angeles neighbourhood when three young boys were mistakenly shot (the local gang mistook them for members of an opposing gang). In spite of there being a church of 9,000 people nearby, with 100 pastors, Holt was surprised to find that not one of those people seemed to know anything about the shooting, nor did any (as far as he knew) turn up to the spontaneous memorial that took place in the alleyway beside the Holts' kitchen window.



The problem was most of that enormous congregation *drove* to their church, and drove home again to a different suburb.

Holt is the author of a book, [The God Next Door](#), which also focuses on the themes discussed in the videos.

Perhaps your church isn't very neighbourhood-connected. However, *you are*, and there's nothing to stop you being involved with the people who live on either side of you, or behind you, or across the street. We tend to think of our neighbours as being there by chance; perhaps the reality is, God has put them there *purposely*.

**"If a leader can't get a message
across clearly and motivate
others to act on it, then having
a message doesn't even matter."
~ Gilbert Amelio**

[Losing Andrew Carnegie](#) – Seth Godin

Carnegie apparently said, "Take away my people, but leave my factories and soon grass will grow on the factory floors.....Take away my factories, but leave my people and soon we will have a new and better factory."

Is there a typical large corporation working today that still believes this?

Most organizations now have it backwards. The factory, the infrastructure, the systems, the patents, the process, the manual... that's king. In fact, shareholders demand it.

It turns out that success is coming from the atypical organizations, the ones that can get back to embracing irreplaceable people, the linchpins, the ones that make a difference. Anything else can be replicated cheaper by someone else.

How applicable is this to the church/mission?

Bullying is an issue in the church as in the business world. It may be the minister (and his family) who are being bullied, or the minister himself who's doing the bullying. In an article in the Harvard Business Review entitled [Create a Bully-Free Workplace](#), Nathanael Fast writes:

Among targets of bullying, 40% never told their employers and, of those who did, 62% reported that they were ignored. This suggests there's a significant opportunity to increase profits and beat the competition by eliminating the prevalence of workplace bullying in your organization. But how?

The first step is to identify the root of the problem. A set of [recent studies](#) conducted with Serena Chen, a psychologist at UC Berkeley, may provide some insight. We found that power is partly to blame. However, in contrast to the old adage that "power corrupts," giving people power did not turn them into bullies. Rather, it was the simultaneous pairing of power with feelings of inadequacy that led people to lash out. In our studies, the power holders who felt personally incompetent became aggressive, not because they were power hungry or had domineering personalities but because they were trying to overcome ego threat. Put simply, bullying is a cheap way to nurse a wounded ego.

For more information on bullying at work, check out the [workplace bullying site](#).