

# Candour



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of Aotearoa New Zealand

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## Mission and the three-fold Office of Jesus Christ



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The next edition is published in July 2013. This edition will have the theme: Ecological Christianity. Contributions on this topic are welcome, and can be sent to the editor, [loisandbob@xtra.co.nz](mailto:loisandbob@xtra.co.nz)

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## Note from the Editor:

The three articles in this issue of *Candour* are edited versions of talks to the annual meeting of Southern Presbytery in August 2012. The theme is introduced in the guest editorial by Selwyn Yeoman, the moderator of Southern Presbytery.

In this issue you will find two new emphases. First, there is an article by Amber Parry. Amber and Nathan have a young family and minister at Island Bay in Wellington. Each ministry family is, of course, unique, but we hope that Amber's article will encourage the sharing of other experiences and coping strategies in what could become a regular column in *Candour*.

Second, there is a letter responding to articles about discernment at General Assembly (the topic for the March issue of *Candour*). One good way to offer feedback to writers is to pen a letter to the editor. Articles which may be forgotten and their ideas and insights lost, can thus become part of an interchange and discussion that, in turn, can lead to change and progress in our church's life and witness.

Good reading!

*Bob Eyles - Editor*

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# Our Mission and the Mission of Christ

*Selwyn Yeoman, Southern Presbytery*

**T**hat the Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning became a formative mantra during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in recent years our primary identity as a missional community is increasingly being owned in presbyteries and congregations.

But every organisation that has something to sell has adopted the language of mission, and we are at risk both of having our language co-opted by other forces and being ourselves co-opted by them. It is not enough for us to use the language of mission to cover any community minded action. We are called to mission by Christ. It is Christ's mission in which we participate and that call must shape how we do it.

Therefore our thinking about mission needs to arise from our thinking about Christ – not just about what Christ has done, but who Christ is and the nature of his relationship with the world. These are all related in the classical reflection upon the three offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. Few of us will have preached in these terms in recent years, but they still provide a robust foundation for our missional life.

Christ is the human embodiment of the Word which is the self-expression of God, the ordering “mind” by which all things have been brought into being and are sustained still. All things to do with Christ as God's Word relate to **the prophetic role**. We are a called people. It all begins with grace. Those who are called must be listeners, therefore we are a contemplative people. The Word that engages us invites participation in a story, therefore we have things to say – and should be thoughtful but not ashamed about that. Do we tell the Christ-story in our proclamation? And as people of the creating and sustaining Word we have a crucial role in Creation. Environmental care is not a peripheral activity for us but is central to the ministry and mission of Christ!

To speak of **Christ as priest** almost invariably invites either puzzlement or rhetoric about the priesthood of all believers – meaning everybody having a crack at leading the service. Whereas Christ's priesthood is about mediating relationships. At the centre of priestly ministry is the gift of fellowship, the meal which involves the self-giving of the host. In that meal, all of life is given and received. Priesthood is about all of life – not just the Sunday service – being both gift and offering, and all that passes through the priestly hands being made holy. The priestly ministry of Christ invites us to an inspirational vision of the potential significance of daily life, and it calls us to make the work of reconciliation central to our understanding of what we're here for. But what has happened to our social engagement, our peace-making, our global ecumenism? What kind of holiness do we honour in the Creation which God has chosen to inhabit and through which all God's goodness is extended towards us?

Kings are pretty much out of fashion but we still confess Christ as Lord and sing about the Servant King. **Christ's kingship** is not of this world. Christ is among us as one who serves, who is always seeking the wellbeing and restoration of those whose feet are being washed. To participate in his kingly ministry we are called to servant ministries and to seek the well-being of those who have no power to advocate for their own interests. They will be the marginalised, but here, too, the Earth itself calls for our loving care.

In the light of the classical offices we discover a message about Christ, a life in Christ, that gives an all-embracing gospel which nevertheless has not lost any of its uniqueness.



# The Prophetic Office of Christ

*Diane Gilliam-Weeks, Southern Presbytery*

**F**or 1700 years the church was unable to fulfil its prophetic task of speaking the truth to powers that be, because in Christendom the Church held the power. We were called to be a dwelling place for God, to be formed more fully into the image of Christ who was grace and truth in the flesh. We were called to proclaim his truth to all powers and principalities. Instead, we became caretakers of an institution; rather than speaking out with one voice together, for centuries the prophetic task was left to courageous individuals like Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Te Whiti, Rutherford Waddell, and Kate Shepherd.

One of the three offices of Christ and his church is the prophetic office - the prophetic task. And it's my conviction that today we need a Christian community that is prophetic by its very existence, not simply by what is preached on Sunday morning, proclaimed in study groups, and written in books. We need to embody our prophetic task in everything we do.

Today Christendom is long gone, like the early desert mothers and fathers we find ourselves dwellers in the wilderness. So we have to ask ourselves what it means to build prophetic communities from a place in the desert. And how do we identify the desert in a world of high speed, high-tech and high expectations. A world where a sense of entitlement to instant results, threatens in our own community to rule out listening and waiting and being at peace in the presence of God...

But there are some good things about the wilderness, things are simplified and the basics become life giving. If we are to proclaim Jesus' grace and truth to the powers and principalities of this world we need to know where we got this basic idea in the first place – that Jesus is God's very prophetic word spoken to us in the flesh.

Was Jesus, as the modernist era proclaimed, just a home town kid showing off? Or was he grace and truth in the flesh as God's ultimate prophetic voice? I want to assert that there is no way to separate the prophetic Word of Jesus and his work from our work as followers of the Word made flesh, for they are rooted in the words of John the theologian (John 1:1-14):

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so through him all might believe. John himself wasn't the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world didn't recognise him.*

*He came to his own, but his own didn't receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

God speaks and the universe is created - galaxies and giant nebula come into being, black holes, cosmic gases, suns and stars - all the elements that make for life. God speaks and an untouched Hebrew girl conceives a child; this child will become a light for all nations, the light promised by the prophets that shines in the darkness. God has spoken and God's very Word has become grace and truth in the flesh. Jesus is born.

In our gospel reading, John the theologian helps us to understand that the anointed one, the holy one, who enters our humanity in Jesus is the very same Word with a capital 'W' through whom the whole universe was spoken into being.

Because of this incarnation – this enfleshment of God's Word in a child born in Bethlehem – a relationship of intimacy is made possible between God and all humanity. To all who receive him and who believe in his name, he gives the ability to become children of God.

God's purposes are to be made clear in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Where people have walked in darkness and misunderstanding, now there's a walking and talking, a human expression of God's Word for humanity.

This child, born not in a palace but in a manger, would show us by his life and by his death just how God's purpose of 'Shalom' - of peace with justice for all people - would be achieved. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you, make peace, show mercy, be humble, travel light, share what you have to feed the hungry, care for the sick, let the oppressed go free...

Men and women, living in the deadly darkness of fear, exploitation abuse and slavery, can now see by the light of Jesus' life and teaching, that their wellbeing is what God desires. Men and women who live in the toxic gloom of pride, greed and envy, who live in the wasteland of cynicism or the exile of perpetual resentment and judgement of others' right to be in or out, can now see by Jesus' light that there's another way to the fullness of life. Those who believe in God's name will do what Jesus did; they'll become children of God, as he was a child of God.

Jesus would announce, not the occupation of Wall Street or Aotea Square or Invercargill, but love's occupation of the whole earth. Jesus would demonstrate and call his followers to demonstrate that the purposes of God will not be defeated by the worst humankind can do.

How well are we doing? I want you to consider what key questions we ought to be asking our congregations in relation to Jesus as prophetic Word incarnate, heralding the coming of God's reign. Questions like, "How well do we wait for God?" "How well do we prepare for the coming of God's future?" "How well do we make room for Jesus in our lives?" "How well do we carry Jesus' saving message into the world?" "Does the message we carry into our community sound like good news to the poor the persecuted, the different and the other?"

Dare the global Christian community ask how well we occupy the Earth in Jesus' name? Dare our congregations ask how well we occupy our communities in Jesus' name? How well we shine the light of God's love into the dark places of our families, our community and the world?

Because this is exactly what we are meant to be doing while we wait for the full realisation of the Kingdom of God.

You see in many ways - whether your congregation struggles or thrives, is in the city or in the country - today in the wilderness of corporate powers and self-worship where God is meaningless; even our largest churches are as small and vulnerable as Jesus was in the first fragile days of his life.

The very revelation of God arrives as a human baby - tiny, vulnerable, without protection, with no resources of his own and relying completely on the generosity of his parents. An infant citizen of a nation occupied by force and by fear.

This child would grow to understand his calling to do what Israel failed to do, to shine the light of God's justice and peace, God's mercy and forgiveness, to all nations, even to enemies and oppressors. This child would die, speaking the truth of forgiveness to the powers of Rome; this child would die with his prophetic word on his lips rather than retaliate.

But that was not the end! By the power of God's Spirit, the Word made flesh would be raised and he would call his followers to take the light of God's love to the ends of the earth. God's Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and everyone who believed in God received the power to be called the children of God.

May Christ be in you today and in your church and may your life be full of grace and truth. And as we journey together into God's promised future, let us pray that grace and truth will one day occupy the Earth.

If we are to be Christ's prophetic body on Earth, then above all, as individuals and as the gathered people of God, we must learn to listen for the Word of God in our context and then speak and act it out with courage.

I offer the following questions for discussion and prayer:

- How well do we make room for Jesus in our life together?
- How well does our church listen together in humble submission to the Word of God?
- How well do we allow God to address us and shape us as the people of God?
- The prophets, including Jesus, acted out their message as often as they spoke it. How well does our church speak the truth in power to our community, our nation and especially our Church?
- How well do we prepare for the coming of God's future when ALL creation will be made new and reconciled to God?
- In what ways does our church community – by its very life – proclaim that the reign of God is at hand?
- Are we caretakers of the church or prophets of community wellbeing?
- How well do we carry Jesus' saving message into the world? Dare the global Christian community ask how well we occupy the Earth in Jesus name? Dare our congregations ask how well we occupy our communities in Jesus' name? How well do we shine the light of God's love into the dark places of our families and our community and the world?

Because that is what we are meant to be doing as we wait for the time when God is all in all.

## Interchurch Unity: Churches Working Together – a social issues study booklet for Presbyterian and Union churches

The latest Presbyterian Church social issues booklet titled, *Interchurch Unity: Churches Working Together* explores how churches of different denominations can find ways to work together in a joint sense of mission.

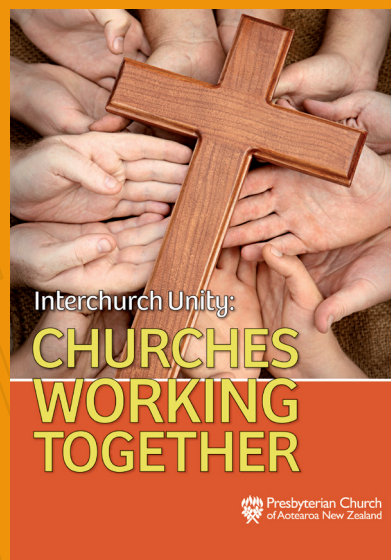
The booklet looks at what ecumenism and interchurch cooperation means, its history, evolution and its future.

It explores the biblical mandate for the unity of the church and examines the similarities and differences between denominations. It suggests how churches can engage effectively with other denominations, and challenges us to give a greater priority to working with other Christians in our communities.

The booklet also discusses how our Korean and Pacific congregations are contributing to what it means to be Presbyterian.

The study emphasises the importance of cooperation, especially for declining congregations, and in times of natural disaster.

This is the tenth in a series of group study booklets produced by the Presbyterian Church to encourage congregations to reflect about contemporary issues that are impacting our communities.



**Copies of Interchurch Unity: Churches Working Together will be sent to all churches in early March.** If you would like more free copies please email [office@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:office@presbyterian.org.nz) or phone (04) 801 6000 or download copies here <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/speaking-out/resources-for-speaking-out> Free copies of the other social issues study booklets are also available.

# Mission and the Priesthood of Christ

*Jason Goroncy, Southern Presbytery*

**O**ne does not have to hang around the church very long to hear some weird stuff.<sup>1</sup> For example, when I converted to Protestantism, one of the dominant narratives as I picked it up – usually via some kind of epistemological osmosis but sometimes quite explicitly – was that the incarnation was God’s attempt to get the reconciliation ball rolling; that Jesus had laid the foundations for reconciliation and then he had gone back to heaven to sit down next to God in the great lounge room in the sky to watch over how events would pan out. But just before his exodus, Jesus formed a little community who would work as subcontractors to the big boss upstairs. And foreman Jesus trusted this community to carry on his work while he was away, promising to turn up again when the job was nearly done just to check that it had all been done according to his instructions. And what this means, I’ve often heard, is that if God’s costly work in Jesus is to make any real difference in the world then we need to get off our bums and make sure that we get everyone we know into a home group or along to a church service or, at the very least, reading a book or watching a DVD that communicates in graphic terms just how warm one’s future existence is going to be unless one prays some magic words.

In other words, according to this narrative, although God had once been personally invested in this little project called “creation”, God had now essentially taken a back seat to the whole programme. God is now a bit like a corporation’s founding director who still serves on the board in a sort of honorary position but who has really relinquished the right to call the shots – the shareholders now do that. More seriously, in this plot, the church’s central claims about God – namely that God is triune and that God has, in Jesus Christ, embraced a fully human existence – make little if any practical difference in how we think and go about being a faithful community. This is a profound problem.

About 25 years ago, I came across a remarkable essay on the place of Jesus Christ in worship.<sup>2</sup> Therein, the Scottish theologian James Torrance suggested that God had made creation to be something like an orchestra for God’s glory and that human beings were created to conduct that orchestra, to lead the orchestra as the priests of creation in divine praise. And the reason that the whole creation is groaning in universal travail, Torrance argued, is because creation’s priests have miserably failed to fulfil their vocation. But rather than abandon God’s purposes for humanity and for creation, God comes in Christ as a second Adam to be the Priest of Creation, to do for humanity

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what humanity fails to do; to offer to God the worship and the praise that the sons and daughters of Eve have failed to offer; to be creation's worship leader who carries on his loving heart the joys and sorrows and prayers and conflicts of all God's creatures so that he might reconcile all things to God. To be truly human, therefore, is to participate in the life of this particular identity.

Torrance's presentation of the good news articulates grace's deep penetration into our broken humanity; we see that God has assumed our humanity in all its fallenness and has refused to be fallen in it and that Jesus's offering of praise and obedience carries all of creation into the healing freedom of God. This is what his priesthood means: that here at last is a true human being, given by God, who sets up shop inside the perversion and disorder of a diseased creation and who step-by-step, blow-by-blow, moment-by-moment, loves God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength and in doing so leads creation in fitting worship which then transforms the human condition from the inside out.

So what does this mean for our life together and for our worship? It means that we are never abandoned to work out life on our own. It means that our life and worship is preceded by an act that makes our life and worship possible. It means that our life and our worship are at core about participation in the life of another. It does not mean that each of us can be our own private priest exercising our own private arrangements with God. Rather, it means that our worship is our joyful 'Amen!' to and sharing in Jesus's own worship to God in the liberty and power of the Spirit. As the writer of Hebrews has it, Jesus is our *Leitourgos*, our worship leader (Heb 8.2), who takes the painful groans of our hearts and our fumbling words and our tormented efforts at prayer and praise and places them into his own mouth and offers them up to God in the freedom of the Spirit. Priesthood, in other words, has to do with the worship that God provides.

Priesthood is also about mission, about the mission of God which reaches all the way back into the life and election of Israel and, indeed, back into the decision of God to be God for us in the act of creation. Israel is neither a detour nor a mere prelude on the way to Jesus. Rather, Israel's very job description (which I take to be encapsulated in Exodus 19.6, "you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation", is grounded in God's own concern for the nations. Israel represents a people elected by God to be the light to the world, the city on the hill, the salt of the earth, descriptions which are then applied to the church and which immediately recall that we are dealing here with the notion of holiness.

### Holiness and the Overcoming of Space

In a recent article on Jewish notions of prophet, priest and king, Jonathan Sacks, who is the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth and a very fine public intellectual and theologian, describes the priest as "a tender of holy spaces and holy times". He argues that where priests and priestly communities begin to engage in this work of tendering is by distinguishing between the holy and the secular, and distinguishing between that which has been set apart by God for some specific purpose and that which is "common" or "ordinary". And he acknowledges that these are difficult concepts to define because they "belong to areas of existence that stand outside our normal categories for engaging with the world".<sup>3</sup>

But as difficult as these concepts are to define, the task of the priest or of the priestly community is to "keep the divine Presence" in the community's heart.<sup>4</sup> In a community that has forgotten that God is here living in our midst and caring deeply about all creation, the vocation of a priestly people is to help foster something like a public memory. It is this fostering of public memory, Sacks argues, that undergirds the logic for the daily service of the tabernacle and for the keeping of Shabbat (Sabbath), which is what Max Weber refers to as the "routinization of charisma".<sup>5</sup> Sacks believes that holiness represents those points in space and time where God becomes vivid, where God becomes tangible, where God becomes an existential Presence. Holiness, he says:

*"...is a break in the self-sufficiency of the material world, where infinity enters space and eternity enters time . . . The universe is the space God makes for [human beings]. The holy is the space [human beings] make for God . . . The holy is the emptiness in time and space vacated by humans so that it can be filled by the infinite presence of God . . . We make space for God in the same way that God makes space for us, by tzimtzum, self-effacement, self-renunciation."*<sup>6</sup>

Sacks's fidelity here to how holiness is understood in the Book of Leviticus, for example, or indeed in the Pentateuch generally, is, to my mind, beyond reasonable doubt. But this is not an



understanding of holiness with which Christians ought be satisfied. For Christians will want to press this two-fold movement in the most radical of directions by claiming that God's making of space for creation, and creation's making of space for God happens in a particular life called Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>7</sup> And so while for many religious people priesthood is about marking out and then maintaining certain boundaries of preconceived notions of holiness, for Christians, holiness is radically redefined by a particular life that assumes shape in our world.

Viewing holiness through the lens of the incarnation, the first thing we might observe is that Jesus's life, and particularly his resurrection, announces to us that there is no place in creation where Christ is not Lord. The idea that there are "God spaces" and/or "no God" spaces represents a fundamental category mistake as far as Christian theology is concerned. And here we might think, for example, about the narrative in Mark 5 where immediately after freeing a demon-possessed man and causing around two thousand pigs to commit suicide, Jesus is accosted by the synagogue leader Jairus who is the father of a dying girl. On his way to see this girl, Jesus is almost crushed by a large crowd, including a woman who has been menstruating for twelve years – in other words, according to the Levitical law (eg Lev 12), she is ceremonially unclean, and so is everyone and everything she touches. And that means that whoever comes into contact with her is excluded from the temple and its worship.

This is the man who deliberately touched unclean lepers and corpses. This is the man who made a point of eating with prostitutes and calling sinners his friends. This is the man who deliberately went out of his way to do almost everything that the Old Testament prohibits us – and especially priests – from doing. But would he allow this woman to touch him, to pollute him, to make him ceremonially unclean? Because that's precisely what she does when she touches him. And in that action, Jesus restores this woman to her family, to her community, and to God. And the same thing happens again when Jesus finally gets to Jairus's house and takes Jairus's dead daughter by the hand – something that Leviticus 21.11 makes pretty clear that priests shouldn't be doing: "The priest . . . shall not go where there is a dead body." What is this priest of God doing touching a dead girl? He is restoring her to her community, and he is thereby reminding Israel that priestly ministry is both radically restorative and radically risky.

### Jesus's Priestly Community

Of course, to think about mission and the priesthood of Christ is not only to think about Jesus. It is also to think about that community which shares in Jesus's priestly ministry in the world and which is learning to embrace its unique vocation to bear witness to the shape that the divine life assumes in a world in which death can have no future. This means, among other things, that a community which spends "prime time on concerns for which it has no unique competence" has failed to understand its unique vocation in the world, a vocation which "no other agency in the world has been commissioned to accomplish".<sup>8</sup>

It also recalls that God is not sitting around waiting for the church to get its act together, to enlarge the family business and extend its share in the marketplace. Rather, in "God's liberating invasion of the cosmos"<sup>9</sup> in Jesus, God is inviting the priestly community to participate in God's own movement toward the world, summoning all creation into the life of God's reign. Is this not, for example, precisely what is happening in the next chapter of Mark's Gospel, in chapter 6, where Jesus takes some fatigued and pretty-clueless disciples who have just come back from their mission trip – a trip, by the way, that involved neither fundraising nor the construction of any buildings – and places them in the very current of his own ministry of feeding the hungry. Not only is this action a result of Jesus's response to a concern raised by the disciples themselves but the multiplication of loaves and fish is not something that he chooses to do alone. In prayerfully lifting the food to heaven, he acknowledges his dependence upon God, an act that echoes his desire to do only what he sees God doing (John 5.9; cf. Mark 6.41).

In other words, Jesus himself is concerned to participate in the ministry of another. Also, Jesus says to the disciples, "You feed them" (Mark 6.37, NLT); he involves his disciples and they – albeit somewhat confused and probably somewhat begrudgingly – participate with him and so with God in feeding the hungry. I am not suggesting that Jesus needed the disciples, or even their fish and loaves, but that Jesus delights to find ways for his disciples to share in the creative compassion that God is exercising.

## Manifesting Life in the Midst of Death

The more I have reflected on the roles of Israel and the church as priestly communities, the more I have come to appreciate that the community's task is to manifest and bear witness to life in the midst of death. And this is not so odd, I guess, because one of the church's most profound claims is that "the first place to look for Christ is in hell".<sup>10</sup> To be concerned with life in the midst of death is to remember, as the theologian William Stringfellow reminds us, that "Christians are not distinguished by their political views, or moral decisions, or habitual conduct, or personal piety, or, least of all, by their churchly activities. Christians are distinguished by their radical esteem for the Incarnation... by their reverence for the life of God in the whole of creation, even and, in a sense, especially, creation in the travail of sin."<sup>11</sup>

Christians, in other words, are distinguished by their association with one who keeps odd company, who calls us to peculiarity, and who continually corrects our range of view regarding the world's true nature. And that is why, incidentally, all talk of "making the gospel relevant" to the world is absolutely obscene, for not only does it assume that we know more than we do, but it also assumes that God is a stranger among us".<sup>12</sup>

Jesus's peculiar and priestly community is called to be that community in the world which is constituted by and for a love so radically other-person-centered that it refuses to imagine life apart from blessing those who are opposed to it. It is a community that lives "in the midst of the traffic and turmoil and conflict of the world"<sup>13</sup> and that does so in such a way that it is entirely uninterested and uninvested in its own self-preservation. It is a community that throws itself entirely into the embarrassing service of Jesus and that does so not for God's sake but simply and solely for the sake of the world. It is a community that risks the refusal to engage in the politics of violence and in the economies of human indignity, that manifests God's orientation for every part of creation, and that ventures out "beyond the security of objective certainties, [and] worldly possessions, [and] finite aspirations and society's approval". It is a community that risks even its life with God so that it might "become contemporary with Christ".<sup>14</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from his Tegel Prison cell in 1944, reminded us that "the church is church only when it is there for others". And for Bonhoeffer this meant – just as a start – that the church:

*"... must give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the freewill offerings of the congregations and perhaps be engaged in some secular vocation [Beruf]. The church must participate in the worldly tasks of life in the community – not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell people in every calling [Beruf] what a life with Christ is, what it means 'to be there for others'. In particular, our church will have to confront the vices of hubris, the worship of power, envy, and illusionism as the roots of all evil. It will have to speak of moderation, authenticity, trust, faithfulness, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, modesty, contentment."*<sup>15</sup>

Only when the church has the freedom itself to be poor among the poor will it know how to use the riches it has. Only as it journeys the infrequently trodden path away from the centres of imperial power and toward the embarrassing outskirts of Jerusalem and its public scorn will the church be given the kind of freedom to be truly missional and priestly. The priestly community created around Jesus is called to lose faith in present arrangements, to be entirely undaunted by "what the world calls possible" and to trust instead in the completely irresponsible impossibilities that "exist first on God's lips" and in God's imagination.<sup>16</sup>

The words that tell of the ministry of Christ are words of sorrow, poverty, rejection, radical unpopularity. They are words of agony.

It seems ridiculous to apply such words to the ministry of churches nowadays. Yet where these words cannot be truthfully applied to the ministry of the churches today they must then be spoken against the churches to show how far the churches are from being the Body of Christ engaged in the ministry of Christ in the world.<sup>17</sup>

It strikes me that the fidelity of the church's participation in the priestly ministry of Christ also requires that she "take pains to disown publicly the patterns of colonialism"<sup>18</sup> and of Constantinianism that have radically undermined her claim regarding Jesus's lordship over all of life. I also believe that the fidelity of the church's participation in the liveliness of God in the midst of death requires that she be a community who is herself continually put to death by the living word of Christ in Holy Scripture. Scripture, as one theologian put it:

*"...builds the church up by breaking the church open, and therefore in large measure by breaking the church down... Scripture is as much a de-stabilising feature of the life of the church as it is a factor in its cohesion and continuity... Through Scripture the church is constantly exposed to interruption. Being the hearing church is... the church's readiness 'that its whole life should be assailed, convulsed, revolutionised and reshaped'."*<sup>19</sup>

History suggests that such exposure to interruption normally happens via listening and wrestling (like Jacob), and questioning, and keeping open the expectation of the transformation of our vision and of our practices, whether we are talking about rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's or about the full participation of gay and lesbian persons in the life of the community we sometimes fall into the trap of calling "ours".

## By Way of Conclusion

The church is a priestly community or it is not the church at all. And it is a priestly community because it is, by virtue of God's gracious election, called and gathered and empowered by God to, "proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2.9, NRSV). This text recalls not only our Great High Priest's own journey from the darkness of Holy Saturday into the light of his ascension, but it also suggests that the journey from darkness into God's light is the very movement in which the community discovers that it is in fact God's community and that before it was even aware of this fact it had been gathered up into the dynamic stream of God's being for the world. In this movement alone is the Christian community liberated from the idolatrous efforts of self-preservation and self-propagation. In this movement alone is the community brought into what St. Paul called the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom 8.21), a freedom made certain only in one who as the high priest of creation leads God's people, and indeed all creation with them, into the worshipping, healing and participatory life of God.

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- 1 This paper was originally presented to the elders of the Southern Presbytery, Invercargill, New Zealand, August 17, 2012.
  - 2 James B. Torrance, 'The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship', in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. Ray S. Anderson (Edinburgh/Grand Rapids: T&T Clark/Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 348–69.
  - 3 Jonathan Sacks, 'Kehunah and Kedushah: The Priestly Role', Office of the Chief Rabbi, <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/2012/07/11/kehunah-and-kedushah-the-priestly-role/>.
  - 4 Ibid.
  - 5 Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 363–85.
  - 6 Sacks, 'Kehunah and Kedushah'. Italics in original.
  - 7 See Jason A. Goroncy, 'The Elusiveness, Loss and Cruciality of Recovered Holiness: Some Biblical and Theological Observations', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (2008): 195–209.
  - 8 Carl E. Braaten, 'The Mission of the Gospel to the Nations', *Dialog* 30, no. 2 (1991): 125.
  - 9 J. Louis Martyn, 'The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians', *Interpretation* 54, no. 3 (2000): 255.
  - 10 William Stringfellow, 'No Priesthood: No Laity', in *A Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 165.
  - 11 Ibid., 165.
  - 12 William Stringfellow, 'Poverty, Piety, Charity and Mission', *Christian Century*, May 10, 1961, 585.
  - 13 William Stringfellow, *A Private and Public Faith* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 19.
  - 14 Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 180.
  - 15 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Christian Gremmels, et al., trans. Isabel Best, et al., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 503. Italics in original.
  - 16 Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 269. See Stringfellow, *Private and Public Faith*, 80–81; William Stringfellow, *Instead of Death* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 101.
  - 17 William Stringfellow, 'The Freedom of the Christian Life', in William Stringfellow in *Anglo-American Perspective*, ed. Anthony Dancer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 41.
  - 18 Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 12.
  - 19 John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 46–47. Webster here cites from Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.2*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thompson and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 804.

# Sharing in the Work of Christ the King<sup>1</sup>

Jono Ryan, Southern Presbytery

**T**he claim that Jesus is Lord, the King of kings, is thematic to the New Testament. And yet throughout the centuries, the Church has struggled to understand what this means and how this confession should shape our mission. At times, it has prompted the Church's endorsement of monarchical society; in other times and places, it has led the Church to revolution and upheavals of social hierarchies.

Lesslie Newbigin insists that "the reign of God is a reality that can only be announced in parables. It is a 'mystery,' at once both hidden and revealed..."<sup>2</sup> Here lies a challenge: for while some aspects of the "parable" of Christ as King might appear plainly obvious to us, other aspects may remain hidden from our view. Accordingly, I'd like to begin by reflecting on three paradoxes within the "parable" of Christ as King that we often struggle to get our heads around, one way or another.

## Kingdom-less king or King-less kingdom?

For some of us, the image of Christ as King is central in our life and worship. Many hymns and songs are replete with lyrics that encourage this: "All hail King Jesus," "Crown him with many crowns," "Majesty"... Royal depictions of Christ also adorn many of our worship sanctuaries, not least, in stained glass. But for all our worshipful devotion to the person of Christ as King, we can forget about the kingdom. It can sometimes be overlooked that the Christ whom we praise as "Majesty" actually invites us to *do* something, to live differently and distinctively in the world. Christ as King becomes just spiritual metaphor, for there is no dominion, no territory, within which his reign is manifest.

But in this mystery, the opposite can also be true: that our vision reflects a kingdom without a king. We can become so captivated by the nitty-gritty work of God's kingdom, that the actual King becomes irrelevant. We seize upon ethical principles of the kingdom: compassion for the sick, redistribution of wealth or restorative justice, but these become simply an appealing lifestyle or ideology, just as the teaching of Ghandi might become. The kingdom becomes shorthand for something that we do, something that we're capable of bringing about; it doesn't actually require a king *per se*.

Two sides of the same parable. However, as the gospels and the early Church bear witness, the King and the kingdom are inseparable; "the presence of the man of Nazareth meant the presence of the kingdom."<sup>3</sup> And wherever the King is present, then we can anticipate the signs of his kingdom: liberation for the oppressed, freedom for the captives, recovery of sight for the blind...

## The King: royalty but not pauper, pauper but not royalty

Language fails us when attempting to speak about God and the language of kingship is a case in point. Typically in Western culture, we use the word king to describe medieval monarchs or heroes. Consequently for some, Christ (as *King* of kings), becomes the supreme example of this type with an even fancier crown, and an even bigger sword. Many of Jesus' followers (mis)understood him in this way; here was the messianic King – like David but even more royal, more powerful, more impressive.<sup>4</sup> However, we must remember that the Magi could not find Jesus in the palace; and that his royal entrance to Jerusalem was not on a regal stallion, but a donkey.

1 Revised from a message prepared for the Southern Presbytery AGM, 18 August 2012.

2 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: an Introduction to the Theology of Mission*. Revised edition. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 35.

3 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Part Two. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 161.

4 See John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 244-5.



Others will struggle to speak of Christ as King, because this image evokes everything bad about church history: religious violence, pomp and power. For us, Jesus is not a lofty monarch, but rather the friend of the poor, the one who washes feet like the lowest slave; language of thrones and crowns makes little sense for us. We struggle, then, when Jesus speaks of the Son of Man coming in glory, or with Revelation's picture of one who is exalted, majestic and worshipped by all creation.

Two very different views, but both allow our culture's concept of king to define Christ (and either embrace or reject this), rather than allowing Christ to define our understanding of king. But if we would do otherwise, where would we begin? Karl Barth speaks of the Christ's coronation taking place on the cross: not a contradiction, but a confirmation of Christ's authority.<sup>5</sup> And so I would suggest we pay attention to the definition of king found under a sign that read "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (Matt 27:37).<sup>6</sup> The title king, and the image of a crucified man below it, was to Roman eyes a blatant, even humorous contradiction. But when we see it, we are invited to adjust our vision to see what a king – in God's dictionary – really looks like.

Some of us are willing to serve a royal king, but not a pauper, others of us to serve a humble pauper, but not a king. But in the parable of the King with a crown of thorns, we are invited to think differently.

### **The kingdom: powerful but not weak, weak but not powerful**

Talk of "advancing" or "building the kingdom" is often understood to mean increasing the size and influence of our Church. We may wistfully recall times when our church was brimming full of people; it seemed easier to believe that Christ was King when a decent bunch of his supporters were fronting up each week. Perhaps then, as church numbers in the West decline, as congregations merge, as church buildings crumble, we assume that the kingship of Christ is slowly diminishing and we think that the work of the kingdom means rallying more voters and erecting more buildings, in order to safeguard the rule of our King. Let's not forget, then, that the image Jesus most commonly used for the kingdom was the *seed*: small, insignificant, and always under threat from the elements. As we've seen throughout church history, the power of God's kingdom has often been most clearly displayed when the Church has been under threat, persecuted, and weak.

However, others of us have a vision of the kingdom that is so weak and insignificant that we do not anticipate its power to transform the world. For us, Christ may be King, but his kingdom is manifest merely within the hearts of his followers. When it comes to socio-economic issues facing our communities, or political decisions in Wellington, we willingly concede this territory to other kings – that's not the Church's business. We find it hard to believe that Christ's reign extends over all creation, that God has made Christ the head over all things: "[with] all rule and authority and power and dominion" (Eph 1:21). We, therefore, find ourselves a long way from the early church in Acts, which was accused of "turning the world upside down... acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus" (Acts 17: 6-7). They understood what we often do not: that to say Christ is King, to talk of his kingdom, poses a threat to the existing kingdoms of this world.

So, while some of us see the kingdom as a powerful reality, not manifested in weakness, others see it as a weak reality, with no relevance to the powers. We struggle to grasp the mustard-seed nature of this kingdom parable: both small – almost invisible – yet growing into a large and subversive plant.

In thinking about what all this means in relation to the life and ministry of our Church, I again (in good Presbyterian fashion) would like offer three points in reflection.

### **Proclaiming Christ as King**

The first, I take from the apostle Paul: "we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord" (2Cor 4:5). We live in a time when the Church isn't all that popular, where there is often little prestige associated with being a minister or part of the church community. And yet, humans as we are, we crave significance, to be known as doing something Important. This can easily become our motivation for mission and mission then becomes: "doing stuff that will impress other people," driving us toward bigger programmes, and more innovative ministry. "We proclaim ourselves, and occasionally proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord," may, at times, be a more accurate statement.

<sup>5</sup> Barth, Church Dogmatics IV/2, 254.

<sup>6</sup> Biblical quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

## For all our worshipful devotion to the person of Christ as King, we can forget about the kingdom.

When we turn our eyes once again toward Christ the King, we regain perspective on the mission of the Church. The Church is the community that is gathered to proclaim the reign of God in the world – to proclaim the good news that in Christ the kingdom of God has come near. Of course, we need to be pursuing creative and innovative ways of expressing this proclamation, be it breakfast services or supper services, café seating or cushions. But, however we gather and engage in our community, whether it's in new ways or old ways, the important missional question is: "How can we do this in a way that does not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord?"

### Living Christ's kingdom together

While the Church engages in its mission by proclaiming Christ as King, many others are also trying to play the role of king. Whether political parties, or the media, or the bank manager, or other more subtle powers, we are surrounded by voices that try to exert influence over us. They are often successful, and so while we may speak of Christ as king, in actual fact, our life and mission may display quite different allegiances, reflecting the kingdom of the shopping mall, or the career ladder, or the affluent lifestyle.

And yet, from amidst this world of competing voices, the Church is called into being as a distinctive community, a "place where Christ's lordship is operative."<sup>7</sup> In the midst of a world that rewards those who get ahead, a community that honours those who are poor in the eyes of the world. In the midst of a world that panders to the interests of the wealthy, a community that understands it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. In the midst of a world that celebrates the enlightened and overachievers, a community that gives the youngest children ("the least of these"), the disabled and mentally ill, pride of place. In the midst of a world that constantly frets about money and material things; a community that knows that by seeking first the kingdom, their King will ensure these things will be given unto them as well.

The Church lives amidst the claims of many other powerful kingdoms, and yet through it Christ seeks to create a very different community, an alternative economy, if we are willing and imaginative enough to allow him. In our life and mission, then, how can we create different spaces, microclimates where we allow the values of the King to hold reign?

### Anticipating Christ's kingdom

Finally, for all that God wants to do in and through us, in the here and now, Christ's kingdom is also a future reality; something which we await. This too, in our culture, is very counter-intuitive, obsessed as we are with instant results and instant gratification. So often in the Church, we determine the shape of our life and mission by what strategies appear to produce the immediate results we want, rather than by what we believe to be true. Sharing in the work of God's kingdom is an act of faithful anticipation; as Newbigin observes, mission is the "acting out" of the prayer: "Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as in heaven."<sup>8</sup>

Many of us in ordained ministry will be with a parish for five years, maybe ten, occasionally longer – and it's tempting to evaluate our mission and ministry according to those short periods. But we belong to a tradition of people who for millennia, have lived and died proclaiming "Christ is King", living their lives in anticipation of God's kingdom coming on Earth as it is in heaven – perhaps that should have a bearing on the way we think about mission too.

<sup>7</sup> Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 248.

<sup>8</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 39.

# Mission and the Three-fold Office of Jesus Christ

Graham Redding

**W**e are not much accustomed nowadays to referring to the threefold office of Christ, far less associating it with the concept of mission. Yet the threefold office of Christ constitutes a significant doctrinal reference point in our Presbyterian/Reformed heritage. Drawing on a tradition going back to Eusebius of Caesarea, John Calvin argued that Christ's redemptive work may be summarised under three mediatorial offices or ministries drawn from the Old Testament: prophet, priest and king.

The question is, how might these offices inform our understanding of mission for today?

In response to this question, I would make just five points:

1. The offices of Christ remind us that God's mission is irreducibly redemptive in character, and it is utterly bound up with the person and work of Christ. Or, as the Apostle Paul puts it: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:19). There we have the Gospel in a nutshell.
2. The offices of Christ help us understand certain dimensions of God's redemptive activity in Christ. In his *prophetic* office, Christ not only speaks God's Word; he *is* God's Word, the very Word that became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). In his *kingly* office, Christ not only bears witness to the Kingdom of God; he is the inaugurator of that kingdom, a kingdom that brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to captives and sight to the blind, frees the oppressed, and proclaims the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18). In his *priestly* office, Christ not only pronounces God's pardon; he is simultaneously High Priest and Lamb of God, the One in whom, with whom and through whom the whole of creation has been reconciled to its Creator.
3. The offices of Christ refer not only to what has been accomplished in his life, death and resurrection, but also to what he continues to do as ascended Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit. As prophet, priest and king he continues to be active, both in the life of the Church and in the world. As *prophet*, he continues to speak his Word, and believers listen for his voice in prayer and worship, and in their reading of, and engagement with the scriptures. As *king*, he continues to make his kingdom known through the wisdom of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:18), redefining power and authority, setting up camp among the powerless, and confronting with grace and vulnerability all who, like the political and religious leaders that sanctioned his crucifixion, serve idolatrous structures of power and self-serving interests. As *priest*, he continues to intercede for those whom he has redeemed in suffering love, and to gather sinners around his Table, whereupon he gives himself to them afresh, drawing them into the life of communion that he shares with the Father.

**F**or many people there is a huge contradiction between what they hear the church saying and the posture they see the church adopting.

4. Insofar as the church's mission is nothing less than the mission of the triune God, and that mission is nothing less than that which is made known through the work of Christ in his threefold office of prophet, priest and king, then the church is privileged to share in Christ's prophetic, priestly and sovereign work. In conjunction with attending to God's Word, the church will speak God's Word in the name of Christ the Prophet. In conjunction with contemplating the wisdom of the Cross, the church will stand with the vulnerable and the downtrodden and confront idolatrous powers and principalities in the name of Christ the King. In conjunction with being reconciled and drawn into communion with God, the church will declare the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ the Priest, be dedicated in prayer, and open up the life of God for others to enjoy. Although the Church's mission might comprise many other dimensions, these sorts of things will be at its core.
5. In the process of reflecting on the church's mission in relation to the threefold office of Christ, it is important that we consider not just the *work* of Christ, but also his *posture*. He is the *suffering* servant, the *servant* king, the *foot-washing* saviour, the crucified Lord. Any church that shares in his work must also adopt his posture lest it open itself up to accusations of hypocrisy. I was reminded of this when I observed media coverage concerning the recent appointment of Pope Francis. His appointment has been met with popular acclaim, in large measure, I think, because of his posture of humility and love. People are sensing in him something that is authentic to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For many people there is a huge contradiction between what they hear the church saying and the posture they see the church adopting. They are picking up mixed messages: "You talk about reconciliation, but you are divided." "You talk about the cost of discipleship, but you crave respectability." "You talk about sacrificial giving, but you accumulate wealth." "You talk about compassion, but too often you respond with indifference." And so on. It seems to me that while we can gain much from renewed reflection on the threefold office of Christ, we can also gain much from pondering the posture of the One who, "though he was in the form of God, did not regard as equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness; and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).



## UP COMING VACANCY MAIRANGI AND CASTOR BAYS CHURCH

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*A Parish Profile is available.*



# Mission and the Three-fold Office of Jesus Christ

*Ray Coster, Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand*

**In 1998 the Council of Assembly Report to General Assembly had the following statement which I think is still hard to improve on:**

**God is the *subject* of mission**

**Christ is the *content* of mission**

**The Spirit is the *enabler* of mission**

**The Church is the *agent* of mission**

**The world is the *arena* of mission**

As moderator I have said often that one of the main tasks I have is to help the Church keep its eye on the ball. So far as mission is concerned, that is Jesus. Wherever I go I try as much as possible to talk about Jesus, our risen Lord. If we are passionate about him, we will be passionate about mission. While keeping your eye on the ball is a major part of any ball sport, it is not the only thing that is required.

An important part of empowering us in mission as a Church is our belief or understanding. We must think with a resurrection mind-set. We must see the world as God sees it. The missiologist Ralph Winter says: "Every major decision you make will be faulty until you see the whole world as God sees it."

I sometimes wonder if we have allowed too much doubt and scepticism to creep into our world view of faith. Christianity was never meant to be the domesticated civil religion that it has become in the West. Is the Jesus we have our eye on Prophet, Priest and King? Or is he, to all intents and purposes, only "Priest" in this modern era? Did Jesus intend for us as ministers just to be chaplains or priests to the Christian civilisation? Or did he intend for us as Church to be a prophetic voice proclaiming a gospel that is capable of renewing the world and transforming the hearts of all human beings. Tom Wright in his book, *How God Became King*, challenges us to look again at the gospel in the Gospels – which for him is the fact that Jesus is becoming King of this Earth.

In their book, *The Permanent Revolution*, Alan Hirsch and Tim Cathcim write:

*In matters of spirituality, doubt and unbelief change everything; they affect the way we see ourselves and how we go about being the kind of people we were intended to be. Under the corrosive influences of missional doubt and unbelief, there is no permanent revolution; instead we devolve into a self-focused, missionally reticent, risk-averse institution, inching our way ever closer toward our own demise."*

I find that statement to be very challenging for us in the West.

Having spent a little time working with the local church in Asia I have wondered if one of the differences between the church in the West and the Church in the East is that we have a limited or restricted view of Jesus in all his offices. We both talk about Jesus. But the Jesus of the West seems to be so much tamer than the Jesus of the East. The two times I have been to Mongolia were like stepping back into the Book of Acts. The missional work of the gospel and the outcome of that work are amazing. Not only are lives transformed, but I saw whole communities impacted by the gospel. They have an understanding of Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King that motivates and empowers them into mission. That keeps their main focus outside the church, rather than just caring for the people already in the church.

As ministers and leaders in the Presbyterian Church here in New Zealand we could probably all do well to spend more time thinking about Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King and then looking at the implications of that so far as our work and our world is concerned.

# Our Pacific Neighbours

*Martin Baker, Assembly Executive Secretary*

**U**ntil last month, I did not even know what a booby was, or that you could find a single place on earth where within an hour you could drive between London, Paris, Poland and a town called Banana.

Those of you who have ever had the privilege of visiting Kiribati's Kiritimati Island will know of this unusually named bird and group of towns.

Kiritimati or Christmas Island was made infamous by the British using it as a base for testing nuclear bombs in the late 1950s and 1960s. While there are some remnants of this past still visible, the island is now covered with coconut palms, and is better known for its bird life (various types of boobies, greater and lesser frigates etc) and fishing.

About 6000 people are scattered across this surprisingly large island with the most concentrated population being in London where the port and a small hospital are located.

The decision to host a Council of World Mission (CWM) meeting there enabled me to catch up with the activities of the other eight Pacific member churches that make up the 31 churches of CWM.

There seems to be no end to the overwhelming warmth, generosity and hospitality of our South Pacific neighbours; swaying palm trees, 30 degree water, and magnificent tropical sunsets – there is a sense of being in some version of paradise when you visit places like Kiritimati Island.

What are much more difficult to talk about though are the challenges faced by some of our Pacific neighbours. I talk of the community of Nauru, where the average male life expectancy is just 61! This island has been devastated by phosphate mining for the benefit of farms in New Zealand, Australia and Britain.

I heard stories of "black birding" in Vanuatu and other Pacific islands which saw men taken from their villages to work on Queensland's sugar cane plantations.

Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are two nations in a small group of countries where indicators show a continuing decline in the wellbeing of the population since the UN Millennium Development Goals were set a decade ago.

In American Samoa, the US military has planes waiting to transport young people to military training camps from where they are sent to fight wars in far off places (the military and the fish canning factory being the two main sources of employment for young American Samoans).

Tarawa, Kiribati, is now one of the most densely populated and polluted places on earth.

In Papua New Guinea, the disparities created by the corruption in sharing the wealth from gas and mineral extraction has created a powder keg among the burgeoning population of dispossessed young people flooding into Port Moresby.

Tuvalu may well disappear under the ocean within the lifetime of our children.

When I flew back from Kiritimati Island, an aid and development specialist on the flight spoke about the spiralling rates of violence against women and children among some of our Pacific neighbours.

It is not easy to talk about these things. But where are the forums where privileged, middle-class Pakeha New Zealanders can raise these issues? Of course New Zealand has violence and poverty, breakdown of communities, spiritual vacuums and matters of personal isolation and loneliness. But the issues we face are those of a developed nation and while there are serious inequalities, taken as a whole, our issues fade in comparison to the sufferings faced by some of our neighbours.

While we may be drawn to the plight of those in Africa, and stories of terrorism in Asia, there are things that have happened and are still happening far closer to home which are also worthy of our concerns, prayers and acts of engagement and mission.

Many Pacific nations are home to communities that are among the most isolated; they are places the world's media seldom go to, consequently we are less familiar with our neighbours' struggles. If your congregation is thinking of its mission commitments, why not think first about where God may be calling us to reach out to in the Pacific?

# The Balance of our Family Life in Parish Ministry

Amber Parry

**I was interested to see in the latest SPANZ magazine our Moderator Ray Coster talking about getting a balance with work, family and church. This coincided with something we have been talking a lot about in the last 6 months - when church is work for ministers, how does family fit in? We have two children: Anwyn aged 4, Calvin nearly 2, and with another baby due in July. I work 2 days a week at the local hospital, organise the preschool Sunday club and help run a church playgroup. My husband, Nathan, is a sole charge parish minister. Life with one child was fine - one child is very portable! But making the jump to two children, and again soon to three, we began to consciously discuss what it meant to be a family in ministry.**

In the past it has mostly been traditional (although of course not universal) for the wife to take charge of children and housekeeping to free up the minister for the church. We decided that wasn't a model we want to follow. The alternative of course, is to find a way that suits your family, and I'm sure it will look different every time. And it will also look different for us as the kids get older and we have different issues to face. Here, though, are some of the things that are working for us now.

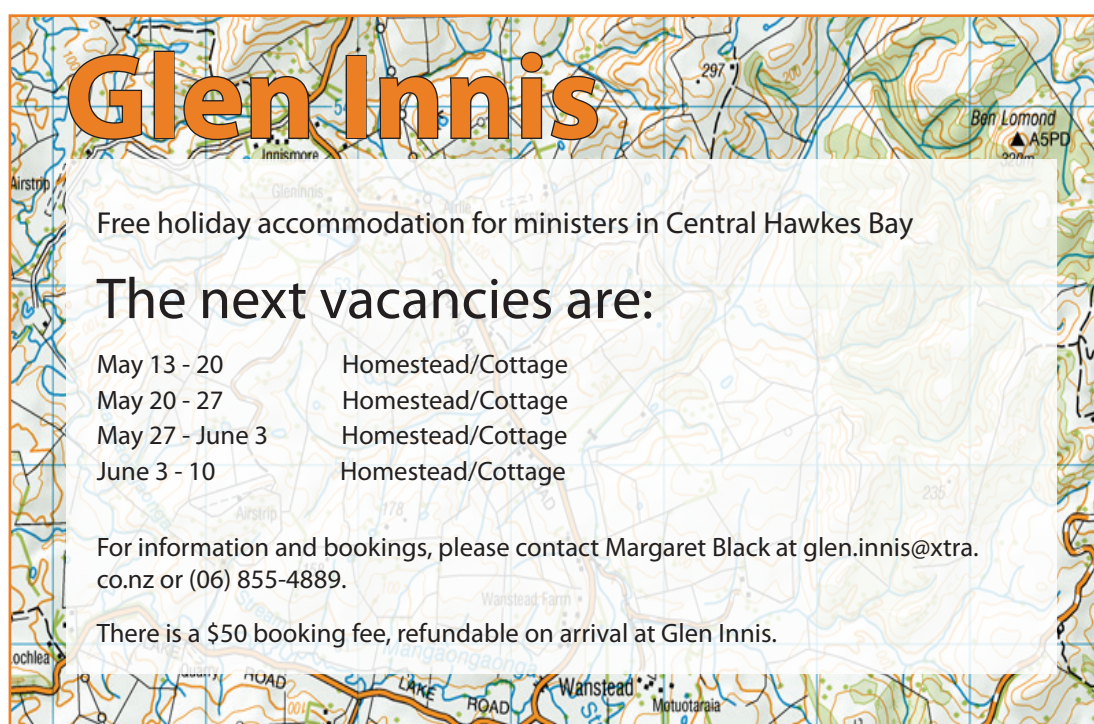
1. Sometimes there are events on Saturdays and weekday evenings that Nathan is expected to be at, such as church working bees, garage sales, setting up for garage sales, dinners and children's events. We have decided that we will all go as a family to these. Often I will take the kids down late, especially to garage sales and working bees, so that the rush of the first half hour is over before the kids add their delightful complications. Not only do they then see their Dad, they see him and others working for the church, and as they grow they too can join in. Our church had a working bee last weekend to chop down a large conifer and clear out dead plants. Mr nearly-2 spent a very long time with a pair of loppers almost as big as himself, trying to chop up conifer branches next to a church Dad. Then he helped put bark in bags to be recycled, one piece at a time. It did warm this mother's heart to see him so involved! Of course I don't always get much done myself sorting them out, but I get more done than if I'd stayed at home, and it stops me grumbling that I'm at home by myself with the kids again.
2. In the past with evening family events (Matariki, Light party, Shrove Tuesday etc) we found that Nathan was getting down to the church early to set up, and then staying late to pack up as well, with us just arriving for the hour in the middle. He found that he was ending up exhausted, trying to do everything and also be Dad, and I was wrangling the kids at both ends of the evening. We finally decided that he would set up or pack up, but not do both, and would encourage more church volunteers to take responsibility for these events. This has so far been working this year; in a small parish it is very easy to end up doing everything yourself, and actively putting boundaries in place becomes very important for families. After our second child arrived, we made it a policy that late church evening events or meetings needed to start at 7pm or later so we could do the bedtime routines together.
3. With me working (I love my job and we really appreciate the income it brings in), and neither of us having any family around, Nathan has often been the childcarer on his day off. There are pros and cons to this, as we have found. One of the best things is that the kids get to spend a whole day with their Dad, usually doing things Mum isn't interested in, like making elaborate building block cities and lots of gardening. It also saves money on childcare. The downside is that this is often the day funerals fall on and I then end up taking annual leave to be with the kids. We did have the kids at a childcare centre on my work days for eight months last year (before it suddenly closed down) and treated Nathan's day off as our Sabbath. We developed a routine of a family outing, some housework, rest and pottering around and I do miss this, now that we are back to our previous arrangement.
4. The last thing we have tried, is to sometimes take the whole family along to conferences/study leave. We did this twice last year, where the venues for the conferences were very appealing (Bay of Islands, for example) and I took the kids sightseeing during the day while Nathan was

away. We managed to fit in a family day either side of the conference, and it meant still having meals together at night. Seeing as its not easy to get other people to preach, making the most of time spent away is important!

I also want to mention that if you are approaching a minister with a family about a vacancy, it might be helpful to think about how the whole family could fit in at your church. We are not looking to move currently, but at times parish profiles have been sent to us and we have noticed a big difference between them. Some do have a heart for children and families and show this in their profile, compared to the churches that would like a minister with children but don't convey a welcome to the ministry of their wider family, or that express a complete lack of interest in becoming "kid's friendly" (either overtly or implicitly).

These are just some thoughts about the journey we are currently on as a family, trying to find a way to love and nurture our children in the church, faith and ministry. We are still learning and growing as our children grow and we face as a family the challenges and delights that ministry brings. We want to send lots of encouragement to other ministry families - God Bless!

**O**ne of the best things is that the kids get to spend a whole day with their Dad, usually doing things Mum isn't interested in.



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# Letter to the Editor

*Peter Dunn, Southern Presbytery*

Dear Editor

I did enjoy reading the articles on discernment and decision-making in the March *Candour*. I would like to pick up a few points in critique.

Reflecting on last Assembly I would say that the underlying problem of the often fraught mode of decision-making was not the process of adversarial debate that we engage with, but the lack of time to do it well. We lacked time to do most things well except the opening at Ohope. For me this was exemplified in the moments, and I mean moments, when we agreed to the Pacific Island Synod receiving Presbytery status as highlighted by Pamela Tankersley. The decision was of historical, spiritual and ecclesial importance. I regretted the relatively short time we took as a Church to celebrate and honour the achievement of the moment.

John Howell's article exemplified the bind we find ourselves in. The business committee has adopted the thankless role of being the "time lord" of Assembly, rather than allowing the creative use of time to allow decision-making a chance of working through complex issues in the best manner possible.

John asked a question of Council of Assembly about the failure of its proposal on mission and representation as if there was a failure in the Council's proposal and process. As a member of the Council of Assembly going into last General Assembly 2012 we went in with a number of significant proposals that had gone through rigorous debate and analysis at Council with the backing in many cases of Presbytery consultation over a two or three year period.

I believe Council operated just like Kerry Enright said it should in his article. However, two meetings out from Assembly, maybe five months beforehand, Council was told that it had 20-30 minutes to present all its proposals, that there was also limited time in Dialogue Groups. We were on a hiding to nothing!

Because Assemblies have become frustrating, people are focusing the blame on the adversarial debate model as the cause and so are beginning to look to the consensus model as a pathway of hope. I like the consensus model and more often than not use it. It works well when it works well. I also like the adversarial debate model. It works well when it works well.

However, I do not share the view that a consensus model will fix our present dilemma as some seem to be hoping. It is open to the same constraint that is affecting us now – time. In fact, good consensus decision-making takes more time on complex issues and it is constantly threatened by the anxious and impatient who, because of the time needed that is too long for their agenda, will often make a break from the discernment process of the Church claiming their actions to be progressively prophetic when they are actually destructive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The consensus model is also open to a particular kind of hierarchical tyranny that the adversarial debating model we presently operate with manages well, by and large.

I attended a Methodist Conference as the Presbyterian observer in the 1990s and witnessed an episode when there clearly wasn't a consensus on a complex and contentious issue, and yet a consensus was declared and a decision made. For those who suddenly found themselves disenfranchised by that premature call there was no way back. I know points of order are a pain, but they serve as a safety valve for fair interaction. I reported back to Council of Assembly at the time saying let's not go the consensus way because it's terrible.

The consensus model will not address the issue of those who are disenfranchised by a decision of the Church any more than a voting by card model following a long debate. Consensus still has the inherent capacity to make winners and losers. I am not sure that there is a way of negating disappointment and hurt sometimes, even if we are Christians doing our best to be Christ-like.

Thankfully General Assembly had the vision last gathering to take heed of one of Council of Assembly's recommendations to move towards an Assembly week addressing the time issue to some extent. We still have to work on the representation at Assemblies though, which is driven by the other bog of national church life - resourcing fair representation in terms of both time and money.

# Ethics in the Presence of Christ

Reviewed by Jason Goroncy

Christopher R.J. Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2012). ISBN: 9780567491732; viii+164pp.

Christian theology is always ethics. To be sure, dogmatics and ethics are not entirely the same thing, but there can be no responsible dogmatics that are not also concerned with ethics, and no responsible ethics that are not equally concerned with dogmatics. Unhinged from one another, both become retarded at best, and tyrants at worst. Put otherwise, ethics is part of the doctrine of God precisely because, as Barth noted, God is responsible for us. So Barth speaks of ethics as a task of the doctrine of God in CD II/2, a paragraph he introduces thus:

*As the doctrine of God's command, ethics interprets the Law as the form of the Gospel, ie. as the sanctification which comes to man through the electing God. Because Jesus Christ is the holy God and sanctified man in One, it has its basis in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Because the God who claims man for Himself makes Himself originally responsible for him, it forms part of the doctrine of God. Its function is to bear primary witness to the grace of God in so far as this is the saving engagement and commitment of man.*

According to Barth, a Christian account of dogmatics and ethics – both evangelical and catholic – begins with a particular person, Jesus Christ – and in his contemporaneous power, truth and love graciously made available to us by the ministry of the Spirit. This, too, is Chris Holmes' claim in his delightful and eloquently written essay, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ*. Slaying the dragon of christological exemplarism as a foundation for Christian and ecclesial existence, Holmes seeks to “draw the life of the Christian community into the orbit of the presence and ongoing ministry of Christ, its natural environment, and thus to explore the consequences of his presence for ethics and offer an account of the moral landscape of ethics that is dependent on its environment”.

Convinced that “ethics is a function of Christ's ‘continually operative’ reconciling and revealing intervention”, and that responsible ethics is as participatory as is life, prayer, worship etc, (ie. it takes place in the life of the Spirit and from the side of Jesus Christ) Holmes is concerned that we engage in conversations about ethics in light of the contemporary presence and determining ministry of Jesus Christ.

He seeks to take with full seriousness the fact that ethics is a function of christology, the human counterpart to Christ's vicarious obedience and faith. “Ethics”, he writes, “is simply action evoked by and participant in his saving action and saving obedience. Accordingly, ethics is behaviour that recognises ‘the pioneer and perfecter’ of our faith”. Ethical acts, in other words, are acts aligned to the presence of a particular person, and to what that person – Jesus Christ – is now doing. Accordingly, ethics is not concerned with the good abstractly understood or indeed with any norm or concept apart from a particular *living* person. And Holmes calls upon Christians to continually turn to *the* person who speaks through his Word.

*Ethics in the Presence of Christ*, as Holmes outlines in the introductory chapter, is concerned with two basic questions: Is this One as narratively attested present? And if so, what is he doing? When ethics becomes attuned to how God's rule in the world takes shape through the present Christ and how God intends his rule to take shape in us through patient hearing of the Word, it, Holmes insists, “becomes an enterprise that begins afresh each day, seeking to do God's will, recognising that the doing of God's will is a matter of being rendered transparent to what God is already doing ‘to keep human life *human* in the world’”.

Drawing on the work of Lehmann, Bonhoeffer, TF Torrance, Webster, Hoskyns, Barth, Newbigin, and others, Holmes offers us a theological reading of three texts from John's Gospel – 5.1–18; 18.1–19.42 and ch 21 – attending to the themes of the presence of Christ's power, truth and love respectively. These three passages form the heart of the book, and are introduced by a fine (though somewhat repetitive) chapter on ethics and presence. The final chapter offers a rich account on how Scripture construes ethical reality. Holmes' decision to attend closely to Scripture is premised on the fact that “a text on Christology and ethics cannot afford to be exegetically thin, precisely because Christology is a description of the person who acts as narratively depicted, and ethics an

account of what the One who acts as Scripturally attested would have of us". Would that more theologians followed Holmes' lead here!

In his exposition of Jesus' healing of the sick man in John 5, Holmes argues that "Christ is acting now among us no less powerfully than he did then; he is present among us by the Spirit in accord with the grain of the universe". He suggests that Jesus' gracious healing of the sick man is indicative of the fact that Jesus "does not will that life go on as normal for this man whom he encounters". The healing of the man is a sign, a sign of "the End" – namely the eschatological enfleshment "of God's glory and presence to Israel". Moreover, Jesus' healing ministry attests his identity as "One in whom God's life-giving rule is present and effective".

Drawing on E.C. Hoskyns' claim (in *The Fourth Gospel*) that "In Jesus the world is confronted by the End", Holmes suggests that the end is already present and contemporary to us in Christ: "The End – that is, Jesus – is present, moreover, to all times, remaking them in accordance with the will of his Father whom he loves. The hour is no less present to the Jews who sought to kill him because he called 'God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God', than it is to us. (John 5.18). We too live in this hour; we too must hear the voice that is speaking to us and live". He continues:

*This is of course quite difficult for people to appreciate. We are used to and often at home in a world wherein we expect to hear nothing because we already 'know' what is real and what can be. But the joy of hearing Jesus is that we realise the extent to which our time is encroached upon by his time. Indeed, Jesus does speak and in so doing he calls 'into question all the criteria by which – in normal affairs – I [we] judge what is possible, what is reasonable, what is admirable'. As late modern people we find it difficult to believe that the reign of God is present to us and impinging upon us ... The gap between the then and there and the here and now is really not so large. In fact, there is not any gap.*

Holmes argues that in meeting the power at work in Christ, one encounters God's knowing and willing – the grain of the universe, to use a phrase popularised by Hauerwas. Power, Holmes insists, is never to be isolated from a determination – namely, that of peace with God himself. It is precisely this determination which is the reality-indication ingredient in the person of Christ. What Scripture testifies to is that this determination is an omnipotent determination which withstands the world's rebellion. So Holmes says:

*If the movement in ethics ought always to be from God to humanity, inclusive as it is of the movement of humanity to God, one must take a moment to reflect upon the eternal basis of such a movement. To talk about the eternality of Christ as what grounds his always 'working', matters precisely because without such an account we risk talking about the presence of Christ in purely interventionist terms (John 5.17). The power of this One as the presence of God's power 'working' is his immanent life. That is not to take away from the unsubstitutable character of these accounts, but it is to say that we are not beholding in them a reaction. Instead, in the Gospels, we are witnesses to the enactment of an eternal determination: that 'all things have been created...for him' (Col. 1.16). It is the Son of God's eternal determination which is manifest here: the eternal determination of Son and Father to guarantee for the creature their participation as creatures in the blessings of covenant fellowship with themselves. To be sure, the way in which this eternal purpose is realized is shaped by the fact that we have sinned. But our sin and its fruits do not determine God's will. God's will – indicative as it is of God's being – is to humanise.*

The implication for ethics is clear:

*We do not need by our activity – principally belief – to extend the power at work in Jesus' ministry into the present or try to make it relevant to our contexts. 'This is because the question of Christian ethics itself remains malformed unless and until set firmly within a wider acknowledgement that "God has founded the church beyond religion and beyond ethics" by the graciously vicarious fulfilment of the law in the person of the saviour.' Ethics is to be taken up in light of the person of the Son as subjectivised in us through the work of the Spirit. That is, law or command does not describe resources for conduct internal to the self or of the Christian community, a story, or various pressing contingencies or contexts. Rather, ethics understood Christologically is a destabilised ethics. It is destabilised precisely because it is an inherently revelational undertaking. What is given in Christ – the fulfilment of Moses' law – 'subjectively takes shape in the mind of the church through the unique enshrining of Christ's gospel'. Ethics understood theologically is thus a destabilized or ever relativized ethics because it is not a matter of implementing a moral program of sorts, but rather a question of being formed by the One – by the objective Person – who truly fulfils himself in us via his faith. By believing in his fulfilment of his will, we too are made participants in him who claims us for faith. And his life – his faith, what he is doing, his*

*present ministry – is done into us. Most importantly, we do not then live as those in a kind of vacuum of our own making. Instead, our life is formed by Jesus who is present in the Spirit's power to us, whose present ministry claims us, so that we too might fulfil the law of our being by believing.*

"A biblical person is one who lives within the dialectic of eschatology and ethics, realising that God's Judgment [sic] has as much to do with the humour of the Word as it does with wrath." So penned William Stringfellow in *A Simplicity of Faith*. Translated otherwise, we might simply say that the person of faith is the person who is living in Jesus Christ, God's eschaton and ethic incarnate, and reigning in his freedom as he who, in the words of the Book of the Revelation, is walking and speaking "in the midst of the lampstands" (ie his people). This is the metaphysic that Holmes seeks to bear witness to in this essay. Clearly, his thesis is grounded on the claim that "metaphysics governs ethics", a thesis strengthened and made all the more stimulating by a sturdy commitment to the doctrine of *creatio continua* – a corollary of the church's claim that in Christ "all things hold together" (Col 1.17), and that in the person of the mediator "that which constitutes our world and indeed our lives is present in such a way that our descriptions of the way things are must be subject to a 'going on'".

Each of the three chapters engaging with specific texts from John's Gospel are a highly stimulating read, sermonic in parts, informed by a maturing dogmatic mind, and laden with pastorally-valuable insights.

The final chapter – On why Scripture construes ethical reality – betrays Holmes' deep indebtedness to Webster's and Krötke's work (Holmes' doctoral dissertation was on Barth, Jüngel, and Krötke), and engages, I think convincingly, with the likes of Hauerwas, O'Donovan and Wannenwetsch, identifying some achilles heels in their use of Scripture for theological ethics. A couple of passages are simply worth repeating:

*To begin ethics with Christ is not enough: ethics is to stay with Christ, to seek to be present to Christ. I am not interested in only a Christological starting point for ethics: that is, Christology as only a beginning but not also the middle and end point of ethics. Ethics involves our being continually schooled by the prophets and apostles. To not only begin with but to stay with Christ, which is ethics' task, is to yield to Scripture. By yielding, the church hears and obeys Scripture's prophetic and apostolic testimony. The church is where ethical agency is nourished, insofar as it is in the church that we are baptised into Christ by the Spirit and nourished by the proclaimed Word and holy table.*

*Scripture is first and foremost an address that needs to be heard as the discourse of One who unceasingly speaks or shows himself through its pages. Its authority does not lie in its ability to speak to our situations, or arise to the degree to which it resonates with us, its hearers. Biblical commands such as the particular command spoken to Peter – 'Follow me' – are not commands that he or we, as those addressed in Jesus' address to Peter, need apply. We need, rather, to hear so as to obey.*

There are a number of places where Holmes makes (over?) statements that demand, at the very least, further clarification or explanation. So, for example, Holmes' claim that the natural post-Fall world is no longer able to function as a "theatre of life" (a claim, *prima facie*, I think, which is undermined by this very book), or that Scripture's display of what is really going on in the world is, "especially the case with respect to John's Gospel", (a claim that requires some further argument; it certainly betrays the fact that in writing this book Holmes has been living in John's Gospel). More significant and obvious by their omission are any sustained discussions on prayer, and on the sacraments. These would, I think, have made this a more satisfying book, building on the already-significant exposition of Christ's immanent reign among and over his people in his prophetic, priestly and royal ministry.

Still, these really are minor quibbles about what is a well-overdue book. Holmes' attempt to discern the present reign of the Word is among the best introductions to theological ethics that I have read. I commend it warmly and enthusiastically.