

# Candour



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of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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## Theology of marriage



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The next edition is published in March 2014. This edition will have the theme: **'Spirituality'**. 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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# On Marriage

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

**In the Bible there are three human institutions that stand apart from all others: the family, the church and the state. While there may be biblical principles that apply in other situations there is nothing in the Bible about how schools, hospitals, museums, business corporations and such like should be run, even though they are crucial to a flourishing society.**

Marriage is different. The 1940 Presbyterian Book of Common Order says, “Marriage is a holy estate, instituted by God, and hallowed by our Lord’s gracious presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. It is commended in Holy Scripture as honourable in all, and consecrated as signifying the mystical union between Christ and His Church.” The Bible begins with a wedding (of Adam and Eve) and ends with a wedding (of Christ and the Church). Marriage, the Presbyterian Church has said, is God’s idea.

If this is still considered to be true, is it time for us as church leaders to lift marriage up and give it greater prominence in our culture?

While the Presbyterian Church has affirmed this view in its Marriage Orders of Service, we live in a society that by and large holds a different view. We live in a context of paradox with differing understandings of marriage. This issue of *Candour* is devoted to the topic of marriage and the articles that follow help us as church leaders face some of the questions of this paradox being debated both in society and Church.

If, as the Church Order of Service says, “marriage is a holy estate, instituted by God”, does the Church therefore “own” marriage? There is not one country in the world that I know of that would answer that question in the affirmative. In most countries the state “owns” marriage. As licensed marriage celebrants in New Zealand, we as ministers can only marry people if we possess a marriage licence issued by the state, and must celebrate the marriage within strict guidelines determined by the state.

**If, as the Church Order of Service says, “marriage is a holy estate, instituted by God”, does the Church therefore “own” marriage?**

In every country the state has the freedom to change the definition and guidelines of marriage and the Church must work within those regulations. A little over two months ago New Zealand changed its definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. No matter what our theology or biblical understanding is, in practice it is clear that the church does not “own” marriage. Should we discuss the question whether or not the state should officiate at all marriages?

Historically marriage has not always been a spiritual relationship. For much of human history marriage found meaning in a political and economic context. In the wealthy families of Egypt and much of the Near East, brothers often married sisters in order to keep property within the family. In Rome the household was considered the foundation of the city, and the city was the foundation of the Empire. Early Rome required Romans to be married and raise children because they were needed for the empire. Marriage was a civic duty, like paying taxes.

The teaching of Jesus placed marriage in a fundamentally different framework than that of the ancient world outside of Israel. It came from the teachings of Judaism and passed through Jesus to the broader world that we know in Western society today.

On one occasion Jesus laid out his interpretation of the Torah on marriage. He said, “Haven’t you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, for this reason a man will leave his mother and father and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Marriage, Jesus was saying, is not just an economic or social institution. For him it is a God-directed covenant that reflects the human capacity for self-transcendence and community. It is a joining of spirit and flesh. It does not serve the state; it precedes the state. Again, I ask, if we believe that to be true, should we as followers of Jesus be giving greater prominence to marriage in our culture?

Marriage is about a promise. John Ortberg says that marriage is a “promise freely offered, fully embraced, joyfully witnessed and painstakingly kept”.<sup>1</sup> The reason a wedding vow is such a moving, wonderful, frightening sentence is that it is a lifetime promise. The promise is not just to avoid adultery or divorce; it is to pursue oneness on every level: physical, intellectual and spiritual – a oneness that does not diminish the individuality of the other but makes it flourish.

While the words of this ideal sound nice, we also have to face the fact that marriage has taken a hit in recent years. Research in the United States of the leading marriage indicators shows a steady decline. The current divorce rate is nearly twice the rate it was in 1960. In 1970, 89 percent of all births were to married parents. By 2011 the rate dropped to 60 percent. In 1960, 72 percent of adult Americans were married. By 2008 only 50 percent were married.<sup>2</sup>

Of those couples that do marry, more are choosing not to be married by a church minister/pastor. A few years back the churches of Tauranga did a survey of marriages in the city. The following figures were gathered from 34 churches of all denominations in Tauranga.<sup>3</sup> Note: in this period of time Tauranga was one of the faster growing regions of NZ – it had a growth rate of over 14 percent between each census.

**Table 1: Marriage Survey Results from Tauranga Churches**

Year	Total Marriages in Tauranga	Marriages in a church or by a minister/pastor	Total Divorces in Tauranga
1990	428	123	293
1995	455	99	273
2000	526	96	331
2007	610	57	453

It seems clear that many of those who are choosing to be married in Tauranga see little reason to seek a Christian marriage.

G K Chesterton wrote that if incompatibility was all that was needed for divorce, no one would stay married. He said, “I have known many happy marriages, but never a compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and survive the instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. For a man and a woman, as such, are incompatible”.

Marriage is not easy. Timothy Keller says, “Marriage is glorious, but hard. It is a burning joy and strength, and yet is also blood, sweat and tears, humbling defeats and exhausting victories. No marriage I know more than a few weeks old could be described as a fairy tale come true”.<sup>4</sup>

After nearly 39 years of being married I would say that marriage is the most profound relationship there is. That is why, like knowing God, coming to know and love your spouse is difficult and painful yet rewarding and wondrous. Even though many of the marriage indicators in society are showing that marriage health and satisfaction are in a steady and concerning decline, there has never been a more important time for us as church leaders who follow the way of Jesus to lift marriage up and give it prominence in our culture. May the articles that follow in this *Candour* help and challenge us to do that.

1 Ortberg, J (2012) *Who is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus* (2012: Zondervan).

2 *The State of our Unions: Marriage in America 2009*. W. Bradford Wilcox, ed.

3 Total marriages and divorces taken from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages

4 Keller, T (2013) *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. (2013: Riverhead Trade)

# Challenges to the Church from the Marriage Equality Act (2013)

*Graeme Ferguson, Northern Presbytery*

**T**he passing of the Marriage Equality Act (2013) marks a paradigm shift in New Zealand's understanding of marriage in society. The traditional understanding of marriage as a contractual relation entered into by mutual agreement between one man and one woman has been superseded in law. This Act signals a shift in cultural awareness. The primary emphasis is on the social contract established in the covenant people make in promising to live together in a stable, committed relationship. Marriage may now include any relationship grounded on mutual love expressed in a commitment to share life together in a structured manner. The law ensures that there is now no discrimination between the different forms these relationships can take. It does not legislate on the personal grounds that may underline the forging of such relationships. It is not ideologically specific and allows for a range of understandings of what constitutes marriage.

In the catholic tradition of the Church, marriage is a sacrament, the sign of which is the physical union of a man and a woman. "It signifies the union of Christ and his Church." In the reformed understanding, marriage is a "gift of God in creation", a covenanted promise of life-long fidelity between a man and a woman, blessed "in the giving and receiving of rings". The State focuses on the contractual relationship between two people.

It is clear that the Act will not be revoked. A period of severe discrimination and persecution of difference is at an end. There will be no return to past practices or understandings. As a result, the Church must rethink how it understands and celebrates marriage today. It faces challenges on all major social fronts – cultural, moral, theological and legal.

The cultural challenge relates to what now are acceptable forms of intimate, structured relationships in society. Previously the relation between one man and one woman was regarded as "normal". Any other relationships departed from what was considered acceptable and so were seen to be "abnormal" or "deviant". However this assumed that all people could be divided into two groups – men and women – each group in contrasting balance with the other. This owed most to Greek natural philosophy which classified groups according to specific difference. It was paralleled in the Hebraic understanding that: "in the beginning God created them male and female". There was no awareness that all people share both male and female characteristics to differing degrees. When the primary grouping is our shared humanity, male and female together, the way is open to recognise a range of relationships all of which may stand within what is normal and acceptable for human relating.

The simplest way of describing this is to see humanity within a bell curve of difference. The norm becomes where the majority of marriages cluster, but the variation will extend out in both directions in ever increasing diversity. All forms, however, stand within the one projection of marriage. No judgement is present in considering examples of marriage that differ from the norm. They are not abnormal or deviant at all, simply different. They illustrate that the range of alternative possibilities extends widely beyond the point where the majority of cases stand.

The difficulty is that people try to insist that the mainstream example is the model to be followed and that all forms of relating should conform to the dominant model. Instead, each form of relating requires the freedom to develop their own ways of giving full expression to different ways of being together in marriage.

Requiring all to conform to one model is a patronising attempt to draw different expectations within one conservative view of "true marriage". It is understandable that some reject societal structures of marriage altogether, regarding them as restrictive and oppressive. These people demand recognition of their right to be different in whatever form they choose to live together.

Traditionally, it has been the Church that has articulated most clearly the societal reasons for marriage. The Marriage Service is written with the understanding that "marriage is the sacred and

life-long union of a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in love and trust". In declaring marriage to be appointed by God, the purposes of marriage are stated as:

- i. Marriage is given that they may enrich and encourage each other in every part of their life together.
- ii. That with delight and tenderness, they may know each other in love and through their physical union, strengthen the union of their lives.
- iii. That children may be born and brought up in security and love.
- iv. That home and family life may be strengthened.

(Source: *Uniting Church in Australia Marriage Service*)

The interesting thing is that all of these roles in marriage need not refer exclusively to heterosexual marriages. They indicate the grounds on which a stable society is built. There are no reasons to deny that same-sex marriages are perfectly able to live out these same purposes. The Church has the opportunity to articulate its understanding of marriage in a way that will include a wider range of relationships than it had previously thought of.

The Church is well-fitted to deal with the moral challenges in the new time. It has long experience in demonstrating the values that grace close inter-personal relations – mutuality in giving and receiving, loyalty in sustaining long-term relations, commitment to each other in all life situations and sharing life together through the years of change and development. Together these constitute a cluster of virtues that are strengthened by the grace of forgiveness and mutual acceptance. They do have to be worked at, worked through and worked out in the new context.

It is in the theological area that the Church has most to contribute. The heart of marriage lies in the gift of love shared intimately and passionately between two people. This provides the dynamic for structured relationships which provide support and security. Every marriage is unique and distinctive in the way love is lived out.

The primary justification for conducting marriage in church is to celebrate the gift of love. "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.... for God is love." Love is a natural gift of God in creation and is expressed in a wide range of ways. By sharing a natural gift that is available to everyone, all are free to ask the Church to enable them celebrate their love in a satisfying, fully rounded manner. This is a sufficient basis for being married in church. The Church blesses those celebrating life in love together by invoking the strength and gracious support of God to sustain people in their marriages. It does so without making any distinctions as to whose love may be respected and without discriminating against any who come desiring to celebrate love together.

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The challenge facing the Church is its ability to discern aright the gift of love wherever it takes shape in human life together. It may not deny that people share love in many different ways. Its task is to assist people celebrate love. In doing so it honours God who is love and who gifts love.

Through the years the primary purpose of marriage has changed. There was a time when it was seen as a protection against lust and immorality. For centuries, the first stated purpose of marriage was the procreation of children. Since children are conceived by the physical union of a man and a woman, other forms of close intimate union were unable to achieve this and as a result could not be regarded as “marriage”.

However, current legal and medical situations include a wide range of possibilities within the family unit. Children can be conceived as a result of medical intervention; they can be adopted; blended families may bring their children with them, including families of same sex couples. Extended families are able to take up responsibilities for bringing up children. Families can foster children.

Since same-sex marriages now have the same status in law as heterosexual marriages, the place of children has needed to be addressed. The rights of partners to adopt the children of their partners have been recognised. There are no grounds on which same sex parents may be excluded from the privileges and responsibilities of parenting children within the family. Various unhelpful myths need to be exploded. Many children do not grow up in a family with both mother and father in place. They still develop in a balanced way. The crucial question relates to providing a secure family unit where children are free to grow up unafraid.

There are grounds for a range of theological interpretations of marriage. The Church will live within a diversity of interpretations and will not try to legislate to exclude responsible differences. Understanding marriage does not enter the “substance of the faith”, but is one of those areas where liberty of opinion is justified.

However, the Church will seek to live with grace and integrity in the public domain. It will refrain from discriminating or persecuting practices. It will not assume that there is nothing to be reconsidered because the Church had reached a definitive understanding before this legislation was under consideration. Those who hold an exclusive position will struggle to come to terms with the new social context within which we now live. People who regard marriage as a sacrament will have grave difficulty with the sign of marriage as the physical sexual act, and may not be able to accommodate a range of forms of sexual couplings as giving adequate form to the sign.

Others again will agree that “in the beginning God created them male and female” and so may have a problem with alternative medical and genetic descriptions of human sexuality. The fact that the Genesis statement is a theological description of inclusive humanity (Adam) and not a scientific distinction, will need to be dealt with.

Those who consider that the current legislation is only right and proper need to be clear whether they are not simply acquiescing in a popular social shift which may need sustained prophetic critique.

However, the Church does face specific legal challenges arising from the role of ministers as agents of the state in solemnising weddings. It is not sufficient that there currently is an exemption for those who feel unable to conduct some weddings on moral grounds. So long as the Church accepts a public role, those who are licensed to act are free to observe the law in all its dimensions.

The Church may not seek to withdraw its agents from some marriages but allow them to conduct others that are acceptable to them, claiming that some marriages are “true” and others are aberrant unions. If the Church is finally unable to accept the legislation then it must withdraw all its ministers from this public role. It cannot forbid some from acting in accordance with the law when the law is appropriately inclusive. The Church may even consider that it may not act for the state at all but will only offer blessings on marriages already solemnised by state officers.

The prophetic stance of the Church calls it to demonstrate in word and action its unqualified commitment to celebrate love in human life in the richness of human diversity. The Church stands with those who have been marginalised, excluded and discriminated against, because this is where Christ always is to be found in action. The Church retains the right to question societal norms where these fall short of the fullness of God’s love. It will encourage ministers to celebrate marriage with all who come in love together, wishing the Church to act with them.



# Peter's Marriage

*Silvia Purdie, Central Presbytery*

**T**he early church re-invented marriage. The three men whom we credit most for “founding” the church – Jesus, Paul and Peter – all had views on marriage that were profoundly different from the various cultural norms of their day. But only one of these men was actually married: Peter. And his wife might just be the most important invisible person in scripture. When I tell people that I’m researching Peter’s wife they say “He had a wife?!”, or “Poor thing, I guess she got left behind in Galilee while Peter went off and changed the world.” Aha, not so!

I have long had a fascination with this Invisible Woman. Who was she? How did she feel about it all? Who was Jesus to her? What might have been her role in it all?

I used to carry a sense of sorrow for her. At what cost is Christian mission? Did she pay the price for Peter’s radical discipleship, stuck at home with the kids, with no man to pay the bills or hold her at night?

Then I discovered one little verse that dispelled this grief: 1 Corinthians 9:5. Paul is arguing for the rights of those in ministry; it’s about getting paid, but it is also about being married, the right to be accompanied by a “sister” (ie believing) wife. And who does Paul use as the example of this? Peter!<sup>1</sup>

This one verse tells us a huge amount about marriage in the early church, and Peter’s marriage in particular. First, he was married still, 25 years on from that unforgettable day when a travelling preacher first walked into their home in Capernaum and healed his wife’s mother.

Second, she was an active Christ-follower. Well, of course she was! Surely she got to know Jesus as well as anyone, back in the days when he practically lived in their house, when he held her children in his arms<sup>2</sup>, when the crowds finally left them in peace and they could talk.

Thirdly, Peter’s wife “accompanied” him. That is she walked the whole journey with him, moving to Jerusalem after Jesus’ death, and then travelled with him. After the Jerusalem Council in AD 49, Paul records Peter’s arrival in Antioch, and the stand-up argument they had (Galatians 2:11).<sup>3</sup> The fact that Paul mentions Peter twice in 1 Corinthians<sup>4</sup> surely means that Peter (with his wife) was known to the church in Corinth, and had actually been there. Look on your map; it is a mighty long way from Antioch to Corinth!

1 Remember that he had 3 names: Simeon, his Hebrew name, and ‘the Rock’ which Jesus kept calling him until it stuck, which is Cephas in Aramaic and Petros in Greek.

2 Matthew 18:1-5

3 Church tradition is that Peter stayed on in Antioch, the main base for mission in Asia, for several years as the first bishop there.

4 also in 1 Cor 1:12

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Fourth, what does “accompanied” mean, do you think? Why not assume that she was an active partner in leadership, ministry and mission!?

At this point we run the risk of imposing our own values about marriage back onto the text. Perhaps we’d be safer staying with scripture, so here’s the next question: what did Peter himself say about marriage, in which we might see a reflection of his own marriage?<sup>5</sup> In 1 Peter 3:

- a. Peter asks women to choose to respect their husband’s authority.
- b. Peter asks men to choose to respect and honour their wives.
- c. Peter calls women to grow into “the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:4)<sup>6</sup> instead of wasting money on external trappings of beauty.
- d. Peter places on marriage the same calling as for the wider church: unity, kindness, love, humility, truth, blessing instead of retaliation, peace instead of fear (1 Peter 3:8-12).

There’s nothing out-dated about these ideas! Peter names here dilemmas and principles that are deeply relevant to my marriage, maybe yours too. What I love about this is that he lived it, he and his wife together forged a way to do marriage and ministry over the long haul and to come through it still singing of love.

Peter’s wife married a head-strong fisherman in a small corner of nowhere, and ended her days (quite possibly) at the heart of the Roman empire, having shared in the founding of (in our unbiased view!) the largest and most influential organisation in the history of the world. Quite a woman, in her quiet way. Quite a marriage.<sup>7</sup>

5 This assumes that we accept that Peter wrote 1 & 2 Peter (with Silas’ help, 1 Peter 5:12), most likely in the mid-60s in Rome, just before he was martyred. (This makes much more sense to me than some alternative authorship.) It is well worth reading these books in The Message translation.

6 NRSV

7 Peter surely fits the saying (attributed to Hubert Humphrey): “Behind every successful man stands a surprised mother in law”! It is hard to imagine how the pragmatic, impetuous young Peter could possibly have become such an incredible leader without a loving woman beside him.



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# A “Biblical” View of Marriage

Mark Keown, Northern Presbytery

**In what follows I will seek to demonstrate that marriage lies at the heart of a biblical understanding of a biblical anthropology and theology.<sup>1</sup>**

## Marriage is Integral to Creation and Image Bearing

However we interpret Genesis, Gen 1:26-28 is critical for a biblical understanding of the identity and purpose of humankind. As Wenham puts it, “with the creation of man [humanity] the creation account reaches its climax.”<sup>2</sup> Both men and women are made in God’s image and likeness. They are given dominion. They are created to be relational and to “rule”. They are together blessed and are to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28, ESV).

While there is nothing at this point specifically about marriage, the heterosexual union of male and female to produce children is unquestionable. In a world before in vitro fertilisation (IVF) – which is, of course, a very recent phenomenon – the creation of a new image bearer requires heterosexual sexual relationships. Even in the case of IVF, conception requires combining male and female elements to produce children; image bearing depends on the created complementarity of male and female. Indeed, no one can live without this – we are all born of it. God’s purpose to form a people in Israel’s story is based at its most fundamental level on heterosexual sexual relations. For the writer of Genesis, God sees this is part of what is “very good” (Gen 1:31).

**M**arriage itself is more directly instituted in Gen 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”

In Genesis 2 the story of humanity’s creation is told again, either from another perspective or to give further clarification. Of Adam it is said, “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18) and so a partner is made for him. The Hebrew for helper (‘ē-zēr) does not imply a subordinate role. The partner is the female, Eve, made of the same stuff and perfectly complementary to Adam.

Marriage itself is more directly instituted in Gen 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (ESV). Marriage is mentioned twice in this text. First a man will leave his “father and mother,” implying that he originated from a heterosexual marriage unit. The man will join a woman, his wife, and they become one – a new marriage unit which will then form a family. This clarifies the basis on which image bearers will fill the earth – through marriages and families. Human society, in terms of the pre-Genesis 3 world, is formed on the basis of the heterosexual marriage relationship.

In Genesis 3, at the heart of the story of Adam and Eve’s failure is their inability to live out God’s command to live as “one flesh” (Gen 3:1-7). The first impact is dissent in the family unit with Adam blaming Eve (Gen 3:12) and God telling the first couple that the result of their failure would be ongoing dissension and male dominance (Gen 3:16). This has played out ever since and needs restoration – this is the work of Jesus and now, his followers.

1 Much of this material is drawn from my blog, Mark Keown and especially “Why I Believe Marriage is Essential to Humanity and the Christian Faith” (<http://drmarkk.blogspot.co.nz/2012/10/why-i-believe-marriage-is-essential-to.html>). See also, “Is the Gay Issue a Secondary Theological Issue” (<http://drmarkk.blogspot.co.nz/2013/08/is-gay-issue-secondary-theological-issue.html>).

2 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Word Biblical Commentary Vol 1. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 27.

These two passages place heterosexuality and heterosexual marriage at the centre of a Christian anthropology. Human ontology is premised on our coming together and multiplying – an essentially heterosexual activity. Marriage is essential to image bearing and is at the very heart of what it means to be truly human.

It is central to theology which, of course, is study of the story of God, his image bearers, and his creation. All soteriology and Christology is premised on it. And when Christ came as a human, born of a woman impregnated by God, he came to restore us from brokenness to true humanness. At its heart is the restoration of marriage and family. Marriage then lies at the heart of a Christian view of a world created by our triune God.

## Marriage is Endorsed in the Law

While Christians do not live under law, the Christian ethic is not antinomian, with the law inscribed on our hearts. Three of the ten commandments, which are the heart of the law, relate directly to marriage. First, the fifth commandment specifically tells a child to obey his or her “father and mother” (Exod 20:12). This implies a family unit and expects children to live obediently to build strong families. Paul quotes this text in Eph 5–6 (cf. Col 3) and adds that fathers should love their wives, treat slaves well, and not embitter their children. Secondly, “You shall not commit adultery”, implies fidelity within the family unit (Exod 20:17). This is endorsed in the New Testament (eg Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21; 10:19). Ideally speaking, sexual relationships are to be limited to marriage units. Finally, “You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife”, does the same (Exod 20:17).

The notion of family is also found in two of the other ten commandments including Exod 20:5, 10, where members of the family will not continue the sins of their “fathers” (implying forebears in inclusive terms), nor work on the Sabbath. Family is implied in both. When the Shema, the central confession of Israel, is given in Deut 6:5, this is followed by a command to pass this onto the children – marriage and family are all through the law.

The rest of the law affirms marriage, rejects adultery, and a wide range of sexual practises which vary from the marriage relationship (esp. Lev 18, 20). Polygamy is assumed (Exod 21:10; Deut 25:5–10, 15–17).<sup>3</sup> Jesus softened the consequences of these practices, renouncing capital punishment, but did not soften Israel’s rejection of sex outside of marriage. If anything he raised the stakes, challenging it at an attitudinal level (Matt 5:31–32).

We can say then that heterosexual marriage is central to God’s vision for Israel as his people.

## Marriage and Jesus

Mark’s Jesus affirms Gen 2:24 in Mark 10:6–8: “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (ESV).<sup>4</sup> Matthew’s Jesus says much the same, but adds the caveat, “except for sexual immorality” (Matt 19:9).

Assuming the authenticity of these statements, Jesus clearly affirms that marriage is instituted in creation, is related to creation of gender and image-bearing, reaffirms marriage of both parents and new marriage units, and should ideally be permanent. The verse is also in the singular, speaking of monogamy.

Jesus’ teaching on love indicates that these should be relationships of love (eg Mark 12:29–31). While Jesus did not get into detail over a range of sexual practices, he challenged disciples not to even contemplate alternatives (Matt 5:27–30), rejected divorce except in the case of unfaithfulness

3 There are many polygamists in the OT, especially among Israel’s elite. Polygamy is not forbidden in the law with some laws devoted to justice for multiple wives and Levirate marriage (Exod 21:10; Deut 25:5–10, 15–17) and there were different views in later Judaism (*Ant.* 12.186–189; 13.380; 17.19–20; *J.W.* 1.97; 562; *M. Yebam.* 1, 21b; *m. Git.* 8:6 A; b. ‘*Abot* 2.5; b. *Yebam.* 44a; CD 4.20–5.6; 11QT 52.17–18). Further on polygamy from a “biblical” point of view see, Mark Keown “What About Polygamy?” (<http://drmarkk.blogspot.co.nz/2013/09/what-about-polygamy.html>).

4 Interestingly, these texts cite Gen 2:24 including the word “two” which is missing in the Masoretic Text but found in other texts like the LXX, Syriac Peshitta, and Samaritan Pentateuch. As Paul and Jesus both include “two” it is possible that the Hebrew they used included it.

(Matt 5:31–32; 19:9), and saw sexual immorality (*porneia*) as an evil (*pornēros*) thing (Mark 7:19–21). This Greek word at the time was a summary term for sex outside of marriage, and should include “every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse”.<sup>5</sup>

While polygamy existed in Israel’s history, Jesus gives no vindication to it.<sup>6</sup> Jesus also stated that marriage and procreation is a part of this age and would not feature in the age to come (Mark 12:25, cf. *b. Ber.* 17a). Jesus himself was not married and so marriage is not obligatory for all humanity. One does not have to be married to be a complete person. However, marriage remains central to ongoing human existence. He also redefines family, seeing those who obey the word as family (Mark 3:31–35). However, Jesus’ mission to form a new humanity is not about individualism, but the redemption of people, marriages, and families. Marriage lies at the heart of Jesus’ vision for a renewed world (Matt 19:28, cf. Acts 3:20; Rom 8:19–24).

## Paul and Marriage

As with Jesus, Paul endorses Genesis 2:24. In 1 Cor 6:16 Paul states, “the two will become one flesh” in his polemic against the Corinthians having sexual relationships with prostitutes.

In 1 Cor 7 Paul gives a range of instructions on marriage. While he expresses his preference for singleness, he endorses marriage (see 1 Cor 7:7, 10–16, 28). He then unpacks Jesus’ teaching on marriage and his own reflections for his context. He gives room for a marriage to end when an unbelieving spouse wishes to end the marriage (1 Cor 7:15).<sup>7</sup>

Otherwise, Paul (or the pseudonymous author) confirms Jesus’ teaching on marriage recorded in Mark 10:1–12). He expects elders to be “the husband of one wife” confirming his preference for monogamy rather than polygamy for Christian leaders (1 Tim 3:2).<sup>8</sup> In all his letters, writing into a Roman world rampant with sexual immorality, Paul repudiates sexual immorality (eg Rom 1:24–27; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:19). Romans 1 is most interesting in this regard in that Paul refers to the Genesis narrative consistently as the basis for his argument against homosexuality (Rom 1:19–20, 23, 26–27). It is a manifestation of human idolatry, a rejection of the creator and goes against nature – heterosexuality which is essential to the created order.

## Other Factors

Israel is a family-become-nation, the family of Abraham (Gen 12:1f). After the flood, humanity is formed from Noah’s family, based around the marriages of Noah and his sons. The nations of the world have their origin in families (Gen 10). Marriage is used to define the relationship of God and Israel, with God as a faithful husband and Israel an unfaithful wife (eg Isa 54:6; Jer 3:1; Ezek 16:32; Hos 1–2). The Church is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:25–33; Rev 19:7; 21:2). Paul’s favourite metaphor for church is family, seen in his wide ranging use of kinship metaphor (God as father, brother, sister). The Church is the family of God, into which all humanity is adopted as God’s children with full rights (Gal 4:4–7). The Church began in family units (*oikos*), such as that of Lydia or the Roman jailor in Acts 16. The vision of a renewed earth in Rev 21 has no hint of sexual immorality (Rev 21:8; 22:15). Marriage is simply assumed.

Clearly, across the biblical narrative which is the foundation of our Christian story, marriage is endorsed and is central. Humans are created through it. The coming of Christ was to restore the original creation intentions. God’s dream is of a renewed humanity – not merely individual salvation, but men and women finding salvation and forming families and communities built on worship and love. We are called to live out Gen 1:26–31 and 2:24 faithfully as God’s people.

With all this in mind, whatever the wider society chooses to do, assuming an anthropology and theology rooted in the biblical story, it is inconceivable that followers of Jesus who live out of the biblical narrative would contemplate alternative marital constructs and variations of what is central to being human in a Christian worldview. To do so is to live a different story.

5 G. Fitzer, “πορνεία, ας, ή porneia sexual immorality, πορνεύω porneuō practice sexual immorality” in EDNT, 137–39 (see also BDAG, 854). For a comprehensive discussion F. Hauck, S. Schulz, “πόρνη, πόρνος, πορνεία, πορνεύω, ἐκπορνεύω,” in TDNT, 6.579–595.

6 See further, Mark Keown, “What About Polygamy?”

7 For my views on a “biblical” view of divorce see “What About Divorce” (<http://drmarkk.blogspot.co.nz/2013/09/what-about-divorce.html>).

8 This does not necessarily limit eldership to men but endorses heterosexual monogamy among leaders.



# Married New Zealand Citizen, Presbyterian, and Lesbian

*Margaret Mayman, Wellington Presbytery*

**I am late getting this article on marriage to the editor in part because I got married last weekend. And weddings, even small ones, take planning. Clare and I have been in a committed relationship since 1996. Ten years later, we celebrated our civil union with a service at St Andrew's on The Terrace attended by our friends, family, congregation and colleagues and celebrated by a Presbyterian minister. And last Sunday afternoon, we had a very small, simple ceremony in which we were married in the presence of our celebrant, our witnesses and the sacred source of love and justice, the God revealed in Jesus Christ.**

Reflecting on the last Assembly, it occurred to me how unrelated our debates about marriage are from the lives of the people most affected by our legalism. At the Assembly, I spoke against the notices of motion opposing the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill and seeking to ban Presbyterian ministers from officiating at the marriage of same sex couples, not as a person who wished to get married. I spoke about the couples who would be affected by the decision and about the society that would only see in our decisions intolerance and bigotry. I spoke about the need to do theology, again and again, because we are not a tradition that simplistically says "the Bible says it and that settles it", especially on issues about which the Bible is silent (loving, committed same sex relationships).

In that context, I could not bring myself to speak about why I would want to marry my partner. At General Assembly, I am not a subject. I am, as lesbian woman in a committed relationship, an object. The thing debated. Yet we should begin theological and ethical reflection with the stories of those who are excluded and marginalised, for that is from where the voice of God speaks to the powerful and privileged. As a middle-class, white woman, I hear God's word most clearly in the voices of poor people and people of colour. Listening to those voices can be enormously challenging.

All theology is biased. We have a standpoint based on our experience, our preconceptions, our ideologies, our subjectivities. There is neither neutral interpretation of scripture nor neutral reading of tradition. Those who claim their reading is pure and without interpretation can only make that claim because they have power to define the lives of others.

So why did I get married? I married Clare because I love her, share my life with her, and know our relationship to be God-blessed. I married her because it meant naming our relationship as fully equal to the other recognised partnerships in New Zealand society. I married her because our relationship is not "separate but equal". I married her because the institution of marriage is no longer about patriarchy, property and procreation, as it was for much of human history, but about love and faithfulness through all that life may bring. I married her in celebration of the sense that we both had after the law passed that we were now fully equal to any New Zealand citizens to whom the state grants a marriage license. And while only a very few people were present, the affirmation and love from family and friends when we shared the news of our marriage, has been overwhelming.

We also married for a very important legal reason. We are about to leave New Zealand to live and work in Australia. While Australia does not yet have marriage equality, I am confident it will. And when it does, the recognition of our marriage will be uncomplicated. A civil union does not have that ease of translation and we know this because New Zealand civil unions have not been recognised in countries that have marriage equality. However, every nation understands the status of civil marriage.

## Civil Unions and/or Marriage

Our civil union in 2006 was our social and spiritual marriage. Nothing can take away from the power of that occasion, from the delight it gave our son, our wider family and friends, and our church.

In 2006, marriage equality was not politically possible. I believed that legal protection for gay and lesbian couples was urgently needed to address appalling discrimination that was permissible until the Civil Union Act and the accompanying Relationships (Statutory References) legislation were passed. Same-sex partners were legal strangers, not recognised as next of kin.

As a minister offering pastoral care, I was aware of the very real difficulties that same-sex couples encountered when they were not recognised as family, particularly in times of crisis such as illness, incapacity, and death. While it was true that same-sex and de facto couples could make legal arrangements to try to ensure that their relationship was legally recognised, these had been challenged by families of origin. I worried about this vulnerability of my own family. The registration of our Civil Union provided simple proof of our next of kin status. I felt an immense relief when the law passed.

I also believed that civil unions would provide social recognition of the families of gay and lesbian New Zealanders. The Civil Union Act and now the Marriage Amendment Act convey the message that the personhood and the relationships of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) people are valuable socially, that all people in our society are intrinsically of equal moral worth and should be entitled to enact their capacity for moral agency.

The opportunity for public commitment, whether in a religious or secular setting, is very important. Churches have been involved in blessing and celebrating marriages in part because we believe that intimate relationships require the support of a wider community if they are to endure.

Those of us who are involved with the pastoral care of young lgbt people are concerned about the lack of role models for them in the area of relationships. Too often, the visible areas of gay culture are those which do not encourage committed relationships and which invite young people into a lifestyle that is not respectful of their own bodies and those of other people. When same-sex relationships have social recognition, especially the fully equal recognition of marriage, society sends the message that gay and lesbian people are valuable and that their relationships, and how they express themselves sexually, matters as much for them as for heterosexual people.

Societal wellbeing depends on the existence of stable, committed, faithful relationships for couples and for any children they may have. The Civil Union Act and the Marriage Act furthered this social benefit by expanding it to same-sex couples, inviting more people to be reflective and intentional about their relationships. Ironically, marriage equality has increased the status of civil unions, because both marriage and civil union are available equally to all couples. People have a genuine choice.

### Marriage Equality in 2013

Until 2011, I quietly watched jurisdictions around the world introduce marriage equality. I thought that most New Zealanders were happy with the “almost equality” provided by the civil union legislation and that changing the adoption law was the major legal hurdle remaining. I was wrong.

I began to meet young lgbt people who were not even teenagers at the time the Civil Union Act was passed. They were deeply unhappy that they were excluded from full social and legal equality

**T**he Bible cannot be relied on a source of opposition for lgbt relationships or marriage equality.

because they could not marry. Their straight friends were outraged on their behalf. Marriage to them was about love and commitment and about society valuing committed relationships. They were smart, creative, energetic and they led the campaign, pointing out that the state was discriminating in issuing marriage licenses on the grounds of sexual orientation. They focused on legal equality, believing that religious and cultural understandings of marriage were “optional extras” on top of the basic rights and recognition provided by civil marriage. Sadly, most of them assumed that religion was the enemy of their lives and their love.

Because of the profile of St Andrew's as a welcoming faith community, we were approached by university students who had founded "Legalise Love" and asked for support. Listening to their passion for equality, their respect for marriage, their concern for the negative messages that lack of equality was sending to vulnerable lgbt youth, and in consultation with the St Andrew's community, I agreed to support the campaign. I provided the same biblical interpretative material that we had used in the Civil Union campaign to show that the Bible cannot be relied on a source of opposition for lgbt relationships or marriage equality.

The Marriage Equality Campaign in 2013 was less turbulent than the Civil Union campaign in 2004. There was public and media support from the beginning. Most New Zealanders believe that variety of sexual orientation is part of the order of creation, acknowledging the growing scientific evidence that there are biological factors involved and even when the influences on orientation are environmental, they are deeply ingrained and not subject to change. The medical and scientific community, and increasingly religious communities, accept the futility, and possible danger, of trying to change a person's orientation. The Macklemore and Ryan song "I can't change" was the unofficial campaign theme song. It was number one on the New Zealand popular music charts for weeks.

As more lgbt people are "out" to their family, friends and workmates, more and more New Zealanders have personal connections with lgbt people. Tens of thousands of New Zealanders have attended joyful civil unions and many more have read about them including coverage of celebrity civil unions in mainstream magazines like *Woman's Weekly*.

On the basis of lived experience, a significant majority believe that gay and lesbian people have the capacity to form relationships that are loving, good and worthy of equal respect and protection. They value marriage but they don't want it to be discriminatory. They accept the evidence that children raised by same-sex parents do as well as children raised by opposite sex parents. Even within conservative churches the consensus against same-sex relationships is crumbling as a new generation of young Christians question their parents' obsession with homosexuality.

## Ongoing Opposition

I believe that opposition to marriage equality is based foundationally on negative attitudes toward homosexuality generally. Political opponents of marriage equality realised, following their failure to stop decriminalisation of homosexuality, human rights protections for gay New Zealanders, and civil unions, that overt hostility towards people of homosexual orientation no longer finds public favour and they worked very hard in the marriage campaign to avoid blatant condemnations of homosexuality. Instead they invoked social and economic arguments (expensive to change the forms, claimed a Catholic moral theologian!) and tautological arguments about definition.

Others invoked the slippery slope argument claiming that if marriage was redefined once, there was nothing to stop it being redefined again to allow polygamy, polyamory and adult incest relationships, despite there being no public support or political will for such changes. And despite the fact that in countries where polygamy is legal, same-sex relationships are not.

Religious voices opposed to rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in general and marriage equality in particular, have become more sophisticated. But if you scratch the surface, the biblical quotes, the religious opposition is exposed. Fundamentally, they believe that homosexuality is a sin and contrary to God's intention for human beings.

We saw evidence of this in the small church-organised protests against the bill where the offensive signage revealed simplistic biblical interpretation and theology. Anti-marriage equality spokespeople may be sophisticated but most of their followers are not. Quite a large part of the Family First brochure encouraging opposition to the bill was taken up with instructions to readers not to be overtly nasty about gay people. Many submitters who used the Family First forms failed to get the message.

The other main argument against same sex marriage is that it is a threat to traditional gender assumptions. Same-sex marriages say that a woman can run a household, or that a man can raise a child. This does not sit well with those whose beliefs and relationships depend living their lives based on *differences* between the sexes. The argument denies that gender is socially constructed. It views marriage as based on specific roles assigned by sex, rather than marriage as an emotional

and physical and social partnership between two individuals. It is a perspective that denies that *heterosexual* people can be in egalitarian marriages with fluid gender roles. Like much opposition to same sex marriage, it lacks scientific validation.

### Marriage is Changing and so it has Always Been

All over the western world, the movement to transform marriage is underway. However, it is not gay and lesbian people who have and are transforming marriage. It is heterosexuals. Theologian Marvin Ellison says that, "Straight people are queering marriage".

Marriage has been changing for thousands of years. For millennia marriage was about property and procreation, and it was based on gender inequality. There has never been one marriage, not even one Christian marriage. No monolithic or fixed Christian tradition exists.

The biblical call to justice and compassion, to love your neighbour as yourself, provides the mandate for marriage equality. Justice as right relationship seeks both personal and communal wellbeing. It is embodied in interpersonal relationships and institutional structures, including marriage. Justice seeks to eliminate marginalisation for reasons of race, gender, sexual orientation, or economic status.

### Pluralism

New Zealand is a country with rich religious diversity. No single religious voice can speak for all traditions on issues of sexuality and marriage, nor should government take sides on religious differences. Therefore, religious groups have the right to discern who is eligible for marriage in their own tradition. In addition, all clergy are free to solemnize marriages without state interference. Some religious communities already performed marriages and unions for same-sex couples, even when the law did not recognise same-sex civil marriage. There is no religious consensus on this matter.

Some churches forbid divorce and remarriage but we would not condone having these theological views inscribed in New Zealand law. It is exactly the same situation for marriage equality. To suggest otherwise, as the Presbyterian Church has done in opposing the legislation, is the height of arrogance and it will take a long time for secular LGBT citizens to forgive the stance taken by most churches in regard to our basic civil rights.

Now, with the project of the Doctrine Core Group, we have an opportunity to engage in theological reflection. This article is a beginning point, not a full theological argument. It is an opportunity to listen to someone whose life is actually affected by the legislation. A married, lesbian, Presbyterian New Zealander.

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# Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told us about Surviving and Thriving

*Reviewed by Kevin Ward, Southern Presbytery*

**T**his is a book which every person working as a minister of the gospel would benefit from reading – indeed, more than reading, but also reflecting on and, in light of that, making changes to how they live and work. We are all aware that many of those who enter ministry in response to what they perceive as a life-time calling, drop out within a relatively short period of time. Precious few of those I trained with nearly four decades ago are still in church ministry. What kills them off is not what goes into sermons or worship services but, as the authors of this book point out, matters of life skills, behaviour patterns and character. This book not only identifies the core issues but also makes suggestions of what needs to change and how to action that.

Rather than just building on anecdotal evidence or personal experience, the book is based on solid scientific research. The team created three pastoral peer groups or cohorts (who were primarily Presbyterian) who met three times a year for two years. They were interviewed to identify the ministry issues they wanted to discuss. They then read books on those subjects, listened to experts who were brought in and then discussed the issues in their groups. The discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed.

**R**ather than just building on anecdotal evidence or personal experience, the book is based on solid scientific research.

From the transcripts, the researchers identified five themes that they believe are keys to sustaining pastoral excellence. These were:

1. **Spiritual formation.** Ministers can be so busy in the multiple tasks of ministry that they neglect their own spiritual wellbeing, the source from which ministry flows. They need to internalise the spiritual rhythms of reflection, worship, sabbath and prayer.
2. **Self-care.** The ongoing development of the whole person: physical, mental, emotional, relational. This involves a range of practical issues including identifying allies and confidants, establishing an exercise routine, planning intellectual development and holidays and creating and keeping good boundaries.
3. **Emotional and cultural intelligence.** These are related to being aware of oneself and also attentive to and aware of other people, places and social dynamics. Much has been written recently about the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership but the awareness of cultural intelligence, crucial in our increasingly diverse world, is only just emerging.
4. **Marriage and family.** Unlike many jobs ministers are never really “off the clock”, and so the demands of ministry can constantly intrude on marriage and family time. It is, then, critical to be intentional about giving focussed uninterrupted time to spouse and children. The significance of the contribution of the spouse to a minister’s resilience in ministry came through again and again.

As well as having lots of good information the book has questions for personal evaluation and reflection throughout...

5. *Leadership and management.* I found these chapters full of good insight and found helpful the way they talked about these as the “poetic” and the “plumbing” side of leadership, both of which are essential to good and resilient ministry. The management side can be found addressed in many books but the poetic side of leadership is much more intuitive and harder to explain and there are some helpful concepts here.

As well as having lots of good information the book has questions for personal evaluation and reflection throughout, as well as suggestions for further reading and exploring through media. This is an area I have taught in for the past 15 years or so, and this book is as a helpful as any I have come across. It is both informed and practical. As well as its personal use for ministers, it would be ideal for a group of ministers to read and discuss together and perhaps also to work through with the lay leadership in their church. I certainly intend using it as an important text for my students.

*Bob Burns, Tasha D. Guthrie and Donald C. Guthrie, Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told us about Surviving and Thriving (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2013). ISBN: 978-0-8308-4103-5; 312pp.*

## Knox Presbyterian Church, Dannevirke (Southern Hawke's Bay) IS SEEKING A FULL TIME MINISTER



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A Parish Profile is available by emailing the Co-convenor Silvia Purdie on [purdies12345@gmail.com](mailto:purdies12345@gmail.com)

# Living with Ambiguity: Religious Naturalism and the Menace of Evil

*Reviewed by Alan Goss, Central Presbytery*

**T**his modest book of 124 pages raises issues which have possibly lurked long in your mind, but which have been difficult to express in a coherent way. This is certainly what it did for me. Donald Crosby is Professor Emeritus at Colorado State University and before that was a minister of religion. This has enabled him to understand how the book's deeper theoretical issues impact on people's everyday lives.

The purpose of the book is to show how, in a world where we experience beauty and horror, life and death, people living in harmony and people maiming and destroying one another, we can nevertheless experience enough confidence and hope in the future to enable us live full and satisfying lives. It's a tall ask.

The world that we live in is an ambiguous world. It's a relentless mixture of good and evil: on the one hand, we marvel at the profusion of life forms that we see in nature; on the other, in the variety of earthly creatures with their distinct sizes, habits, plumages and so on. This diversity is due to the process of evolution – all species come into being and all species eventually die. So it is with us humans. "Life and death, evolution and extinction, are correlative".

Life is a precious gift. We see, we feel, we are aware; but these must also be balanced by our capacity to experience suffering and pain. Nature is pervaded by what the author calls "systemic natural evils" like the epidemic of 1918–19 which killed around twenty-five million people, or the tsunamis of 2004 with a death toll estimated to be around 265,000.

**T**hese, says the author, are neither acts of God nor things allowed by God as part of his purposes.

These, say the author, are neither acts of God nor things allowed by God as part of his purposes. Nor are they evil within themselves. They are not planned, and they are not sent to teach us a lesson. Nevertheless, we call them evil because of the great suffering, misery and death they inflict on so many lives.

Yet we can also rejoice in the wonders of nature – its colour, variety, dynamism and rejuvenating powers which are "all reliable sources of both sustaining and demanding hope, purpose and value for the living of our lives". Nature is all around us. We humans are a part of it and connected to it. And, like God, it is beyond explanation.

So does religion need God? Those who believe in a theistic supernatural God believe that life is meaningless unless they are guided and protected by an infinite being and can enter into personal relationships with that being through prayers of praise, confession, petition and so on. They need the help of an infinite power higher than themselves to see them through; they cannot go it on their own.

Crosby respects these contentions which reflect the faith of millions of people around the world. But he does not find it necessary to believe in or put his faith in such a God. We have each other and (one must add) we have the world. The notion of petitionary prayer has its problems. A theistic

deity who must be persuaded to do good is not a worshipful deity. Without our prayers, does the deity forget to do the good things it ought to? Moreover, petitionary prayers do not always work in the way they are intended to do. Over time, in desperate situations like the WW2 Nazi death camps, or the tsunami which recently reeked havoc in Japan, thousands of people have gone to their deaths in spite of prayers offered by the victims or on their behalf. The frustrations and mysteries of evil still remain as evidenced in the predicament of Job.

The ambiguities of nature; its joys as well as its sorrows, cannot be explained away. We are all in the same waka – we can't have the smooth without also experiencing the rough. As Crosby says:

*"Religion of nature is honest and realistic in this regard. It offers us no pap, no panaceas, no empty promises. It does not build castles in the air. Instead it brings us plumping down to earth. It says, 'find your courage, strength and meaning here. You are a child of the earth, and there is no other place to go'. This is the beginning and the end of religion of nature's wisdom. Is it enough?"*

For some not; for Crosby he finds it sufficient to live an authentic religious life without resort to "bogus manipulative magic". We need a change of focus from belief in God who created the world to a world which, despite and even because of its ambiguities, is a world worthy of our faith, trust and devotion. The thesis of his book, in his own words, is:

*"That we need to look no further than nature itself to find in the splendour, dynamism, and rejuvenating power of the natural world – within ourselves as remarkable creatures of nature – reliable sources of both sustaining and demanding hope, purpose, and value for the living of our lives".*

Crosby reminds us that we humans are integral parts of nature, that nature touches every part of our lives. Like all beings we are products of biological evolution. I write this on the day that same sex marriages have been given official approval here in New Zealand. Our sexual makeup, including our sexual differences, is nature at work. To deny or to disqualify people from sharing our basic human privileges and opportunities is an affront to their very humanity and a denial of the religious rightness of nature itself. These, along with other related issues, are questions which this book brings to our attention and which warrant the time and effort they demand.

Crosby recalls the work of the Jesuit scientist-priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who shocked his fellow Christians when he made what was then a surprising if not heretical statement. Teilhard said that even if for some reason he lost his faith in Christ and a personal God, he "should continue to believe invincibly in the world. The world is the first, the last and the only thing in which I believe. It is by this faith that I live. I surrender myself to this undefined faith in a single and infallible world, wherever it may lead me".

We live in an ambiguous world. There is good and evil, wonder and chaos, life and death. It is for this ambiguous world that the biblical God declares his love. God is indeed part of its ambiguity. Our task as human beings is to ally ourselves with those forces for good – moral, spiritual and environmental – already at work in the world to give us, those who follow, hope for the future. "Find your courage, strength and meaning here. You are a child of the earth, and there is no other place to go".

Donald A. Crosby, *Living with Ambiguity: Religious Naturalism and the Menace of Evil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008). ISBN: 9780791477939; 124pp.

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St Clare's Co-operating parish in Hamilton is seeking a minister to lead us. We are a lively and creative group of middle-age-plus people with a wide range of interests, talents and life experiences which contribute to the heart, soul and life of the parish.

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We invite you to view our parish profile and terms of call by contacting the parish office by email:  
[stclare@xtra.co.nz](mailto:stclare@xtra.co.nz) Settlement Board Convenor: Rev Alistair McBride



# Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-evangelizing the West

*Reviewed by Kevin Ward, Southern Presbytery*

**T**he words “missional” in general and “missional church” in particular are buzz words in the Church at the moment, and nowhere more so than within the Presbyterian Church. Put “missional” in front of anything and it legitimates it! The missional movement has much to offer in thinking about our current situation and its challenges and is something I have engaged with ever since the book *Missional Church* (edited by Darrell Guder) was published in 1998 – yes, that’s how long it has been around for.

My concern is that it has become a fad, and like so many of those ideas that have come and gone in the forty-plus years I have been involved in church leadership, it too will go. Ross Hastings’ book is, I believe, one of the most important and helpful of all the books that have been published with the word “missional” in the title. This is largely because it is called *Missional God, Missional Church*. The order is important. A missional church flows out of a missional God, and so the first task we face as a Church is not developing new forms of “missional” churches or new programmes that will make our existing churches missional, but is actually coming anew to a proper understanding of who the God that we know and experience through God’s sending of Jesus and their sending of the Spirit truly is.

Hastings takes us back to these foundational understandings, before moving us on to envision what this means for our understanding of the church and how we engage with the world and God’s mission. In the missional movement the key text is John 20:21, “As the Father has sent me so I am sending you”, which is followed by Jesus breathing the Spirit onto the disciples. Sadly, in the life of the Church this has played second fiddle to Matthew 28:19–20. Hastings frames the whole book around a wonderful exposition of John 20:19–23, which he calls “the greatest commission”, arguing that in this picture of the frightened disciples huddled in the upper room with Jesus in their midst, all of the elements needed for the Church to fulfil its calling as the community of the God of mission are present.

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Based on sound Trinitarian theology, the book develops a solid ecclesiology and missiology, both of which reflect the character of the God whose life they flow from. One of the great values of the book is that it corrects many of the false dichotomies that can be found in so much other work. The missional God is both a *sending* God and a *gathering* God, and so the Church needs to both send and gather. Flowing from this, therefore, the Church needs to be both *deep* and *wide*, grounded in the traditions of the faith as an alternative community but taking God’s *shalom* far and wide into the world. Both *worship* and *mission* are intrinsic to the life of the church. To do the latter it needs to inculcate the gospel without becoming enculturated itself. In other words, incarnate the

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gospel into the culture of the context it finds itself in without accommodating itself to it. Indeed, the theology of culture and personhood in the book is one of its great treasures.

Hastings has a broad and holistic understanding of mission – what Renee Padilla calls integrated mission, which is much more true to a biblical understanding than the rather limited concept found in much missional church material. There are two final things I am pleased to find in this book. Missing in much of the other literature is a great love of and passion for the Church, which while not being the goal of God's mission, is certainly critical in it. Much of the missional Church material takes a critical and almost dismissive stance toward the Church. "The essential sociality of salvation, implies the essential institutionality of the church. The question is not whether the church is an institution, but rather what kind of institution is it" (p 133). Finally, Hastings gives adequate attention to the role of the Spirit in both the life of the church and God's mission, something that is missing in much of the other material.

Ross Hastings' parents were missionaries for 60 years in Africa, he has PhDs in both science and theology, has served as minister in two urban churches, and now teaches theology at Regent College in Vancouver. All of these factors help to make this a book which combines solid biblical and theological understanding, clear social and cultural analysis, pastoral empathy for people and the Church, and a deep concern for mission in western societies – a wonderful holistic treatment. I cannot recommend it enough for those who are concerned to work in the deep and integrated way that is necessary if our churches are to truly live out the life that our missional God is calling us to.

*Ross Hastings, Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-evangelizing the West (Downers Grove: IVP Academic 2012). ISBN: 978-0-8308-3955-1; 321pp. \$24.*

## Books Received

If you have just read a book that has "gripped" you and that you think may help others in ministry, you are invited to contact our Review Editor, Jason Goroncy, to see if the book is suitable for review in *Candour*.

Jason has received the following suitable books and if you would like to review one or more of these volumes, then please contact him at [jasongoroncy@gmail.com](mailto:jasongoroncy@gmail.com):

Greg Barton, Paul Weller and Ihsan Yilmaz, eds., *The Muslim World and Politics in Transition: Creative Contributions of the Gulen Movement*.

Bartha Hill, *Teaching Hundreds To Heal Millions: The Story of Dr Beryl Howie*.

Stuart Lange, *A Rising Tide: Evangelical Christianity in New Zealand (1930–1965)*.

Jan Morgan, *Earth's Cry: Prophetic Ministry in a More Than Human World*.

Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*.

# David , Bathsheba, Len and Bevan

*Martin Baker, Assembly Executive Secretary*

**I have just read in this month's *Metro*, yet another commentary on Len Brown's affair with Bevan Chaung. The thin vale between a public figure's private and public persona ripped apart by a gossip blogger and a succession of tawdry revelations that seem to fuel a voyeuristic audience's thirst for ever more detail.**

The story is as old as scripture itself as any preacher who has ever worked through the hermeneutical breadth of David's unseemly liaison with Bathsheba will know. The very fact that David's behaviour has been held for such millennia in both oral and written tradition is fascinating in itself to ponder. Why is this scandalous story about Israel's most famous king there at all? Didn't they have spin-doctors back then?

I remember at one of those Easter camps years ago where the teenagers were invited to submit, anonymously, any question that came into their mind on any subject. A small panel of slightly older young people decided that they would draw each of these submissions out of a hat, read the question aloud to the gathered throng, and then share their collective wisdom in response.

The small panel made at least three mistakes. They did not read the questions beforehand, they overestimated their ability to have a consistent and collective voice on any one subject, and they grossly underestimated the mischievousness of a group of (especially imaginative) teens to use this opportunity to ask the most explicit and morally challenging questions imaginable.

I think we got up to about half way through the second question, read to an especially attentive young audience, then the whole exercise had to be called off and the group sent out on a vigorous series of night games (the ones involving keys and spotlights).

Extremely funny on one hand, but on another, a lost opportunity to talk from a position of faithful wisdom, about a subject which perhaps occupies a significant amount of our teenagers' thinking time.

Pornographers, I have read in a recent commentary, have now become the prime source of sex education for our children.

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Arguably, sex, along with income details and religious convictions, belong for many New Zealanders in some kind of private realm in terms of our readiness to talk about them. These subjects are reserved to our conversations with those to whom we are closest. If we throw in issues around our anxiety for our children and our relationships with in-laws, we, according to social researchers, cover off most of the themes that dominate these conversations (I would guess that the balance between the subjects under discussion may change with age and circumstance).

When I think about it, sex, religion and money are more or less the dominant issues in my own work. (viz who should or should not be having it and with whom, and what do we do about it when they do, how to engage a secular community with the Gospel, and how do we use see our vast shared resources for ways that build God's kingdom.)

However, short of reducing our sexual ethic to something akin to “just don’t scare the horses”, can we find some unifying Christian perspective?

In order to find some such ethic we somehow have to acknowledge such things as the polygamy of the patriarchs, the antics of Ruth and Boas, the awful things that David got up to, Jesus’ prohibition about divorce, Paul’s various pronouncements on the subject including his hesitant acceptance of the usefulness of marriage, and the myriad of arrangements and events centred around sexual prohibitions, marriage arrangements and the sexual delights and fears that we read in our scriptures.

With around half of New Zealand’s children born to couples who are not married, we also have to find some way of speaking and working within the reality that in every one of our families or among our friends or within our church communities, there are people who are living in relationships outside of traditional marriage.

I have lived in a “faithful marriage between a man and a woman” for quite some time now – it works, and I believe it is a commitment consistent with the gospel. But I can’t say that I or my wife, ever framed the basis of our marriage in the Genesis language of “therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”. Even though I kind of like the beauty of those words and I think I get what they mean.

Perhaps our starting point for developing a sexual ethic needs to be somewhere near that place Jesus spent a lot of his time – eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. From there we can let our commitment to those who are absent from the lives of many of our congregations set the agenda and priorities for our mission.

Our priorities must also express the same concern Jesus showed to those who are victimised by the sexual impropriety of others – the wives, husbands, partners, friends (and political supporters) who are left stigmatised, disillusioned and marginalised through the actions of the proud whose arrogance leaves them to believe they are the arbiters of their own morality.

When we think about what to tell our children, maybe faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and the other qualities celebrated as the gifts of the spirit, could be a really good way to begin.



## MINISTERS’ STUDY GRANTS AWARDED



THE SENATUS OF THE KNOX CENTRE FOR MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP MEETS EVERY SIX MONTHS TO REVIEW APPLICATIONS FOR MINISTERS’ STUDY GRANTS, AND TO DECIDE ON THE AWARDS.

After the most recent meeting in October 2013, we are pleased to announce that grants have been awarded as follows:

- Kevin Finlay, Kevyn Harris, Clare Lind, Nathan Parry, Johanna Warren, Michelle Shin, Sharon Ross-Ensor and Gene Lawrence all received grants to assist with costs incurred by participants in the cohorts that have been established around the country for “Leading Mission-Shaped Transformation”.

Other grants were awarded to:

- Emma Keown, who is continuing her D Min through Laidlaw. Her thesis will be on the topic of Multiculturalism and the Church
- Henry Mbambo, who is studying for a Master of Applied Social Work through Massey University
- Hyeun Kim, for her PhD study in Counselling - research into parenting experiences of 1.5 gen Korean-Kiwi parents
- Richard Ward and Nikki Watkin for course fees associated with exploring Fresh Expressions and the Emerging Church
- Malcolm Gordon, for course fees for a M Min thesis on “How Contemporary Worship Music is harming our ability to sing together”

As can be seen from the list above, ministers are encouraged to undertake a wide variety of accredited training courses, to enhance their ministry and effectiveness in their own congregations and in the wider church. Applications are welcome any time, but the cut-off dates for applications to be considered are **31st March** and **30th September** each year.