

# Candour



Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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## Discipleship



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# The NCC experience

*Scott Thomson, Minister Emeritus, Wairarapa*

**I keep hearing that a new ecumenical body is in the offing, that our Church is seeking a middle way, and that no one wants to repeat the National Council of Churches (NCC) experience.**

I want to revisit the NCC experience for people with shorter memories. Much of the NCC experience was very good indeed.

## PIONEERS

Ecumenism was alive in this country in settler days. Some churches saw each other as synagogues of Satan, but many helped each other at local level – as far as their competitive instincts allowed. At national level, church leaders joined to make impressive noises on matters they could agree about, like Sabbath observance and strong drink.

After the World War I, things changed markedly. Patchy unemployment became general. The League of Nations proved a sickly child. The social system wasn't working and the heirs of 19th century liberalism lost numbers to communist or fascist alternatives. Some parish clergy saw the answer in soup kitchens, others in a welfare state. Others called their sinful people to rely on the power of prayer. Some tried gallantly to do everything.

The beginning of the modern ecumenical movement is usually traced back to the international missionary conference at Edinburgh in 1910. By the 1930s the missionary hope of evangelising the world in our time was lagging. "Christian" countries, shamed that they had made a world war, seemed to need evangelising afresh in each generation – no easy task.

It was against this background that a few church leaders who had met at overseas ecumenical conferences began to dream of a New Zealand ecumenical body. They were pioneers at a time when the head of the Prime Minister's department assessed Kiwis as "complacent and insular men and chauvinist spinsters". Typically, parish churches had plenty of both.

## WAR

New Zealand churches woke up to the nightmare in September 1939.

Those who had relied on the power of prayer were horribly disappointed. Those who had challenged youth to match commitment shown in totalitarian countries by a commitment to Christ, realised they had subconsciously conditioned young people to fight for King and Country. Many younger clergy and theological students had to rethink pacifist views radically.

New Zealand was ready for war in one respect. Highly effective legislation for power and control had been passed. Within weeks the Church felt the effect when a broadcast sermon by the Rev Gladstone Hughes seemed too near the forbidden topics of politics and international affairs. The censor cut the service off the air. To their credit, the Auckland Presbytery stood by Hughes and the content of his service. No further action was taken against Hughes, but the powers had made themselves felt.

## NEW

At this point, three new strands began to be woven into the fabric of New Zealand church life:

- The Campaign for Christian Order accepted that Christians had failed to avert war. Considerable thought and energy now went into considering the future shape of society, once peace was won.
- The National Council of Churches was formed with assent of virtually all major Protestant churches.
- The Christian Pacifist Society gave thought to prisoners of conscience and to relations among Christians who had taken different positions on that issue.

In a series of studies written for the Christian Pacifist Society, Alan Brash, a young Presbyterian minister in Wanganui, paid attention to the different speeds and scope with which Christians come to understand issues. Brash, a pacifist, was adamant that these differences should never justify demonising or "un-churching" Christians who differ from us.

These were fragile campaigns dealing with very divisive issues, administered in spare moments from cardboard boxes in a corner of an enthusiast's study. Hughes, while no uncritical observer of the war, made it clear that if Brash was appointed general secretary of the NCC, he, Hughes, would attempt to take the Presbyterian Church out of that body.

## POST WAR

Brash, of course, did eventually become general secretary in 1947. I will use his long and significant journey with the ecumenical cause to personalise this brief essay.

In 1948 the World Council of Churches was finally established, while in New Zealand major churches were seriously considering church union. These developments were constitutionally independent but at the same time mutually inter-influential.

Church union, like the wider ecumenical movement, was evangelical in intention – following the prayer of Jesus that “they may all be one that the world might believe”. Church attendance was still strong and for many the question of family values in denominationally mixed marriages was a serious matter. It seemed as if uniting churches could be a part of the more Christian social order that was hopefully taking shape.

Conservative evangelicals perceived the sort of religion that had nourished them as being under threat. Conspiracy theories thrived. For the anti-Catholic, the WCC was a sinister super-church, bent on leading Christendom back to Rome. For the anti-communist, the agenda was Marxist, a plot orchestrated by Moscow. The doctrinally conservative feared the influence of “liberalism” and even syncretism with non-Christian faiths. For these, the NCC was guilty by association.

Part of the conflict was that some took institutions and their processes seriously, while others did not. Many chose not to understand that the NCC was a council of New Zealand churches and the power lay with those churches. Brash contended that the NCC was the most conservative body in New Zealand church life, because it could do little unless the churches – or at least their national bodies – agreed. In those days, insular New Zealanders, right up to government level, were poorly informed on many issues. The NCC received a flood of information on all sorts of issues from the WCC and was this passed on to the ecumenical committees of the member churches.

### STRAIN

In spite of cold-war clouds, the 1950s were a happy, heady time for the churches, establishing new congregations, collecting for CORSO and crusading with Billy Graham. By the 1960s, however, perspectives were flooding in through ecumenical channels that intruded on the comfort zones of “complacent and insular men and women” who were not very ready to consider avant garde issues, even if they came via their own denomination and clergy. For example, the WCC now included Eastern Orthodox churches of which most Kiwis knew nothing – and many Orthodox churches existed in communist countries. There was also a great thaw in relations with the Vatican.

In former colonial countries, independent churches emerged with their own priorities, their own analysis of their social problems and of their relations with other religions. They were networking, without asking missionary permission. Impressive leaders emerged, but were white church goers reluctant to hear third world church leaders – particularly if they were angry? Were parent churches, particularly in wealthy America, prepared to continue providing needed financial support to third world churches now slipping beyond their control, and even beyond the denominational fold?

In 1969 the NCC fronted an imaginative and very widespread study programme with TV support, *Interview '69*. More than 100 attended study groups in our small rural parish alone. Issues that were controversial – Vietnam, South Africa, racism, theological controversy and feminism, to name a few – had a good airing. With Catholic folk participating in religious study, this was cutting-edge stuff, but not all parishes, or all clergy could handle this level of intimacy.

### CHANGE

The long reign of identifiably Christian political leaders gave way to the heady humanism of the brief Kirk years, and in turn to the bruising divide-and-rule of the Muldoon era.

## POSITIONS FOR GRADUATING STUDENTS

The Introduction Workgroup of the Leadership Sub Committee is starting to seek positions for graduating students from the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership who are available for a call to a congregation or congregation-sponsored mission opportunity. If you are a Convenor of a Settlement Board please consider approaching us about one of our newly trained ministers. In most cases they will be available for a call late in 2011 or early next year. Brief profiles have been in the latest Spanz but further information can be obtained from the convenor through whom all approaches and correspondence should be channelled.

### Rev Alastair Smales

Convenor Introduction Workgroup, 5 Glen Place Mosgiel 9024

EMAIL [jcwa@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jcwa@xtra.co.nz) PHONE 03 4892933



There were plenty of divisive issues. Few people had the time or energy to engage them with full intellectual rigor. If, for example, God was dead, time need not be spent at God's tomb on Sunday morning. One more authority figure was removed who had stood in the way of unfettered personal action! Individual expression and user-pays largely replaced a sense of being one people. If negotiations had ended in church union, things might have been different, although I suspect that few local congregations would have united from positions of strength.

Some who embraced change tended to become single issue people. The bicultural journey became all to some; feminist issues, Springbok tour, nuclear-free or gay rights seemed all to others. Single issue agendas are a big factor in the insular American political scene, and much that was new in New Zealand church life in the 1970s and '80s was essentially American.

### **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

A couple of examples typify many issues that rebounded to the serious detriment of the NCC.

The NCC founded CORSO, a secular relief agency. It also established a church-related counterpart which became Christian World Service. Post-war life returned to normal in some countries and the emphasis shifted to development aid, and therefore to analysis of the causes of poverty in third world countries. The development debate led to calls for government participation at a level that would make a significant difference to taxation.

The ecumenical movement also drew attention to racism. The WCC Programme to Combat Racism gave small grants, including a few for welfare assistance by some liberation movements which controlled significant territory. This was slanderously opposed by official and unofficial propaganda from white minority interests in southern Africa. Settler New Zealand had many links with white southern Africans, and virtually none with black ones.

When Alan Brash returned to New Zealand from the highest administrative position in the World Council, he accepted a short regional NCC appointment in Auckland. Reading his papers, I am struck with the pain he experienced in attempting to hold a middle position.

### **A NEW ECUMENICAL BODY?**

If a new and widely representative ecumenical body is to be established in this country, I think certain lessons from the past will need to be learned.

What would be the criteria of membership? The former basis – that Jesus Christ is Lord according to the scriptures – always appealed to me, not least for having a good Presbyterian ring! But is that criteria too broad when we have such deeply held divisions about the scriptures? Is it too narrow? Dialogue with other faiths – not least Maori spirituality – is also an ecumenical challenge. Should the new body dialogue with other faiths? Should it include other faiths, or should it leave dialogue to other bodies and to individuals?

Once the membership criteria are established, Brash's warning must be taken absolutely seriously. We must not un-church or demonise those who differ from us. People who come to promote single issues through the new body will risk the ruin of it.

Once membership criteria are established, the membership must decide the proper function of this body. Is it a forum, a voice, an interpreter or an advocate?

This body will operate in a country much more fragmented than in 1941. It will exist in a setting where religion is more governed by personal taste and niche interests than before.

The WCC was a coming together of three streams of Christian concern – (1) mission, (2) church doctrine and organisation, and (3) ethics and social action. Whether a new body can successfully combine these will be one of the most critical questions.

Not least, a new body must be adequately resourced for the tasks attempted. It will have to establish relationships between members and relate to community organisations and media in a clear and highly professional way. This would make heavy inroads on tightly stretched church resources of people and money.

A new ecumenical body presents the churches with a huge challenge. It may even decide whether we have the will to live or the determination to die.

(Scott Thomson is a retired Presbyterian minister living in Masterton. Scott is researching the life of the late Dr Alan Brash and would be glad to buy copies of Alison O'Grady's biography and Brash's own *Footsteps in the Sand*. Write to PO Box 101 Masterton 5840 or phone 06-377-0805.)

# Direct Training

*Peter Cheyne, Moderator*

## “...teach them to obey everything I have commanded.”

Jesus obviously intended the Church to produce quality followers who obey everything he commanded. How can we do that? How did Jesus himself?

I don't claim to have a comprehensive understanding but to perhaps provide a simple grid that might help us think about our methods.

I suspect there were four basic components in Jesus' discipling method:

	Practice (Hands)	Theory (Head)
<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Demonstration</b> The teacher does it	<b>Instruction</b> The teacher explains it
<b>Student</b>	<b>Experimentation</b> The student tries to do it Can the student do it? Are there better ways to do it?	<b>Reflection</b> The student thinks about it Does the student understand it?

**Demonstration** might be termed modelling or example. Very clearly, foundational to Jesus' method was that he did what he wanted others to do. He did it, they observed, they imitated.

Jesus modelled healing, praying, preaching, responding to criticism, taking time out... you name it. After washing the disciples feet Jesus explicitly said that he had modelled something he wanted them to imitate. “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:5)

**Instruction** was also fundamental. Jesus is world famous as a teacher. The demonstration was combined with instruction. Some of it was public and some of it was private, like when Jesus took the twelve *disciples* aside and helped them understand something that had happened or was to happen. The last supper was teaching-intensive.

Thirdly, Jesus often required the disciple to **reflect**; to think about what was going on or why they were reacting as they were. Sometimes their reflection was private. On other occasions it occurred in dialogue with Jesus as he asked further questions and teased out their understanding.

Consider the following questions:

- What were you talking about on the road?
- Who do you say that I am?
- Do you love me?
- Why were you afraid?

**Experimentation** occurred when Jesus put the disciples into situations that would test their growth. Could they heal the boy with a demon? How would they feed 5000 people with only two loaves and five fishes? Would they throw the net over the other side of the boat? He gave them practical ministry experience such as when he sent them out on mission into the villages.

These four basic components were used in any order and might be repeated even within a single episode.

Consider the account of Jesus and the disciples caught in the storm on the lake (Mark 4:35-41). The storm provided a teaching opportunity. Jesus' questions revealed that the topic was faith.

vv.35-37	As they crossed the lake a furious storm arose	<b>Experimentation.</b> A God-initiated test. How would the disciples react?
v.37a	Jesus slept	<b>Demonstration.</b> Of the peace that comes from faith
v.37b	The disciples woke him and complained	<b>Experimentation.</b> Their reaction was fear

v.39	Jesus calmed the storm	<b>Demonstration.</b> Jesus used His authority
v.40	Jesus asked “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”	<b>Reflection.</b> Why were they afraid? What was going on inside of them?
v.41	In fear they ask each other, “Who is this?”	<b>Reflection.</b> A good question to ask

Here the sequence was EDEDRR. Jesus demonstrated faith in both the peace of sleeping and the power of rebuking the waves.

In that instance there was no explicit instruction. But this wasn’t the only lesson on faith. There was instruction at other times: “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20) But maybe demonstration predominates. Maybe faith is caught more than taught.

We could analyse any incident or any theme in a similar way. How, for example, did Jesus teach patience or healing or the nature of the Kingdom of God? I suspect we would discover some sequence of demonstration, instruction, reflection and experimentation.

That’s cool but the acronym doesn’t quite work! D.I.R.E Training doesn’t sound very good! And while I have considered the head and hands components, I haven’t included the heart. The heart is decision territory. Jesus also **challenged**. Challenge might occur in conjunction with any of the previous four. Watching someone might challenge us to aspire to be like him/her. Teaching can inspire us to aim for something new. Reflection and experimentation, by definition, challenge us to change our views and/or adopt some new behaviour.

Jesus’ clearest example of challenge was perhaps “Follow me”.

It seems that that challenge (at least in the case of Peter, Andrew, James and John) followed a period of demonstration. Earlier, Jesus had said, “Come and see” (John 1:39, a theme repeated in vv. 41-42, 45-46, 50-51). Jesus appears to have invited people to simply observe without making any commitment. There might also have been instruction and reflection in this period. Only then did Jesus issue the challenge. On the basis of what they had seen, would they follow Him?

The same basic elements were employed both before and after they chose to be followers of Jesus: in other words, in both phases of the Great Commission: evangelism and discipling.

When the student responds positively to the challenge there is a **turning point** (you might prefer *transformation*). The fishermen did follow. The healed demoniac did go back to his people telling what Jesus had done for him (Mark 5:19-20). Peter did choose to feed Jesus’ sheep.

	<b>Practice (Hands)</b>	<b>Theory (Head)</b>	<b>Decision (Heart)</b>
<b>Teacher</b>	Demonstration	Instruction	Challenge
<b>Student</b>	Experimentation	Reflection	Turning Point

D.I.R.E.C.T training sounds much better!

## What is the point of all this?

We might consider how Jesus is discipling us. We have his example and his teaching, plus the example and instruction of other Christians. Jesus asks us to reflect. Are we taking onboard what Jesus is saying to us? Do we understand the lesson he is currently trying to teach us? In our rushed lives we take little time for reflection and yet it is a basic component of growth.

Similarly, are we willing to experiment? When God speaks, do we trust God enough to do what God asks of us – even if that is only a first, tentative, experimental step? If we try and fail, as the first disciples did often, some of the best lessons might emerge.

## Learning disciple-making from the disciple-maker

More importantly, in this context, the point is that we can learn about training.

Jesus’ parting words to the disciples were for them to make disciples. The gospels show us Jesus making disciples and finish with the Great Commission. Acts starts with the Great Commission

(1:8) and shows us the early Church making disciples. The epistles demonstrate disciple-making as their writers instructed and encouraged the next generations of Christians.

Our primary task is making disciples.

The D.I.R.E.C.T framework, for all its weaknesses, might help us assess our own disciple-making methods.

## **D.I.R.E.C.T Questions**

### **Relationships?**

Do we even have relationships like this? Disciple-making is essentially relational. It is about one person mentoring another. Jesus modelled that. Demonstration, instruction, reflection, experimentation and challenge all imply relationship. A turning point is most likely when it is a quality relationship that is warm and supportive.

Are you intentional about developing discipling relationships? Is your church fostering relationships where these components are expected, with the purpose of making disciples?

My inclination is that we rely more on programmes than we do on relationships.

### **Can we demonstrate?**

Jesus' model requires leaders who are living and modelling obedience to his commands.

### **Growth wanted?**

Turning points are the objective. Do we expect growth in our church members?

### **Too much theory?**

In many churches the primary discipling tools are perhaps preaching and small groups. Preaching is perhaps instruction and challenge. We might hope that reflection and experimentation follow but who would know? Instruction and challenge are part of the process. But preaching needs to be supplemented with demonstration and there need to be other ways of encouraging reflection and action.

Similarly, many small groups will focus on discussion (instruction and reflection) but may not use demonstration or experimentation or much challenge.

The elements of demonstration and experimentation in Jesus' example suggest we should do much more of our disciple-making on-the-job. Jesus' disciples learnt about ministry and mission in the context of ministry and mission. They watched Jesus minister and mish (I mean, evangelise). It was in the context of real people and real situations. And when they were given opportunities to minister it was, again, in the context of real people and real situations.

We tend to do our training in isolation. We fill in answers in Bible studies, watch DVDs and go to conferences. We focus on the theory which is not wrong in itself, but is inadequate. It might be revolutionary if our small groups spent less time in people's lounges and more time in the world, with younger Christians learning by watching and working alongside their mentors. Afterwards they could reflect together on that ministry experience, seek more instruction etc.

People visiting the sick might take along an apprentice. Small group leaders should identify an assistant leader. Demonstration and experimentation should happen in the group meeting. Instruction, reflection and challenge are best when the leader and the apprentice meet separately. If the intention is for the assistant to lead a group maybe challenge comes when he/she is asked to graduate from assistant leader to leader.

### **Who can demonstrate?**

Churches need to have some way of identifying those who are ready to disciple others. If the hospital visitor is simply caring but has little personal faith, doesn't pray before going and wouldn't pray with a patient or mention Jesus, he/she is not going to be able to train someone else.

We should ask if a particular person is capable of demonstrating what we want others to learn.

Jesus' training involved a graduation. The twelve were in training for three years. Only then were they commissioned to make disciples themselves. Much as some people hate the concept, this involves having some idea of people's spiritual maturity and rejoicing with those who we do believe can become disciple-makers.



### **“Come and see” evangelism?**

Imagine you ran across someone who was showing interest in Christianity. Could you say, “come and see”? What would you show them that might persuade them to follow Jesus?

When Jesus did it, they saw miracles; they saw his character; they saw submission to God. Could we demonstrate a community of people who love one another? Jesus said that would persuade them! Could we show them people who have been transformed by the power of Jesus? Could we show them people who have sacrificed because of their love for people? Could we talk about prayers that have been answered and could they see a community praying and perhaps witness those prayers being answered?

I think we could. In many of our churches genuine God-things are happening. It might not have to be spectacular. I was impressed recently by a story of a family who invited another person to eat with them once a week. That person had never before eaten at a table where people weren’t constantly arguing. Even something as simple as a peaceful family can be a profound witness. We can demonstrate Christianity.

### **The value of living together?**

Stories like that make me ponder the potential of having people in our homes, maybe even living with us. I know that is scary but something like coping with adversity might be learnt only by living in close proximity with someone and not via occasional meetings. A person might learn about marriage only by observing a marriage. It is something I need to reflect on. I am not suggesting it is compulsory but that it might be a valuable tool we have neglected.

### **More questions**

If we ponder each element of Jesus’ method, we will discover both questions and answers that will help us shape a more effective disciple-making process. Are we taking time to help people understand what they see? Do we know our own Bibles, and how good is our teaching? Have the recent earthquakes given opportunity to reflect with younger Christians on where God is in all of this? If we do something together, do we take time to reflect? Often the learning comes only as we think it through and discuss it. Should we challenge people more or are we too timid? Are there people who should be encouraged to get involved in some ministry or to grow up a little? Do we give people opportunities to experiment and possibly fail? Are we there for them when they do fail, encouraging them to not let that define their future?

I am not suggesting this analysis is profound or comprehensive. It might be one tool that can help us think through how disciple-making happens.

Bottom line: we are called to make disciples. Jesus and the apostles and subsequent generations have demonstrated that, taught it and challenged us to do it. Let us simply reflect on what we see in them and, supremely, on what we see in Jesus. Let’s think about what made Jesus effective and how that might help us be effective. Let’s take time. What in Jesus’ example is instructive for us?

And then let’s see if it works. Let’s give it a go. Let’s experiment. Let’s get into disciple-making relationships that involve demonstration, instruction, reflection, experimentation, and challenge, always looking for those turning points that mean a disciple is being made.

Could you lead us on our journey?  
*“Walk the talk, talk the walk” is our mission.*

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# Take it personally – discipleship as personal interaction rather than programme

*Martin Macaulay, East Taieri Presbyterian Church, Mosgiel*

**I**n my early days as a Christian I was taken through the Navigator discipleship stuff (the Design for Discipleship Series): Bible study, memory verse, giving my testimony, the whole nine yards. Actually, it was good foundational material that contributed to my Christian growth. But what was most influential was my time with the man who led me through this course.

I learned much more from the personal interaction with him than from the discipleship course itself and our relationship lasts to this day. He was an elder in a Presbyterian church and led the youth group and a home group. During our runs together I learned about a pastoral heart when, to my initial annoyance, he would allow our run to be interrupted by stopping to talk to someone we met. I learned about prayer from praying with him. Our prayers became more desperate when his first child had complications during birth. We weren't sure if she was going to survive. It was a first-hand example of trusting God in the midst of a trial, and then praising God together when his daughter survived and thrived.

**T**hankfully we can read in the scriptures what Jesus did and taught, and the effect Jesus had on those around him.

Character discoveries occurred and rubbed off on me. One Sunday evening I was helping him show a gospel movie at church. We had invited lots of people who didn't normally come to church. A good crowd had gathered, popcorn was popping and we were all praying, excited at the opportunity for changed lives! The movie was on an old reel-to-reel movie projector (before the days of data projectors) and just as we began, the film began jumping at the projector gate – chunky, chunky, chunk. Unless we could fix it, our carefully planned outreach evening was going to be a disaster. In the stress of the moment, I heard my mentor muttering under his breath and I thought this will be interesting. I leaned closer to find out what he was saying and heard the words, "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!"

My mentor sometimes addressed me "Martin, Martin my son" (from words attributed to one of Martin Luther's mentors who said, "Martin, Martin my son. I see nothing but a cross before you"). Once, when I had moved to another city, he phoned me and my flatmate answered. Mistaking my flatmate for me he said, "Martin, Martin my son..." My flatmate called out, "Martin, it's your Dad!" We laughed, and yet in a 2 Tim 1:2 kind of way, it was my Dad.

I have benefitted from many programmes over the years, and I have so appreciated the mentoring that people are able to do from a distant century through their writing, but my most significant discipleship moments have been with people like this man. It takes time, but it is lasting. Their personal interaction has shown me what life is like as an apprentice of Jesus.

We need to take discipleship personally and not rely on programmes, because it works and of course because Jesus modelled it. But there is another reason. I believe life-on-life interactions are

crucial in discipleship because of the nature of truth we are seeking to pass on to others. A Christian disciple is not someone who simply understands and gives assent to certain doctrinal statements. A disciple is one apprenticed to the master who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

*The manner in which Jesus makes the Father known is not in infallible, unrevisable irrefractable statements. He did not write a book which would have served forever as the unquestionable and irrefractable statement of the truth about God. He formed a community of friends and shared his life with them.<sup>ii</sup>*

Thankfully we can read in the scriptures what Jesus did and taught, and the effect Jesus had on those around him. But when we are disciplined we experience another dimension to learning that is beyond reading a book. Michael Polanyi observed that the skills of a master are lost if they are not passed on first hand to apprentices in the next generation. The line of apprentices who made violins like Stradivarius has been broken.

*It is pathetic to watch the endless efforts – equipped with microscopy and chemistry, with mathematics and electronics – to reproduce a single violin of the kind the half-literate Stradivarius turned out as a matter of routine more than 200 years ago.*

*To learn by example is to submit to authority. You follow your master because you trust his manner of doing things, even when you cannot analyse and account in detail for its effectiveness. By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art...<sup>ii</sup>*

That sounds a lot like discipleship to me.

In my current role I contribute to discipleship in a variety of programmatic and structural ways. I preach, pray, lead worship, foster small group life, and ensure a range of programmes are running, including intentional discipleship using material such as the Omega studies. However, my most lasting impact is probably still time-intensive, life-on-life discipleship. I think of the delight in seeing young ministry interns mature in Christ and go on in Christian ministry. I think of the challenges and joys of seeing people (including my own children) take steps in following Jesus. This doesn't impact big numbers of people quickly, but I remain committed to having at least one person I'm relating to in this way. I'm taking that personally.

i Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 89.

ii Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1958), 53.

## Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church



奧克蘭華人長老會  
Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church

### ASSISTANT MINISTER (English Congregation)

- The Auckland Chinese Presbyterian Church (ACPC) is seeking a full time Assistant Minister for its English speaking congregation. The Church is situated in the heart of Auckland's CBD, and is one of Auckland's pioneer Chinese churches.
- The minister will be expected to serve a vibrant bi-lingual cross-cultural congregation and be responsible for the oversight of a diverse community committed to ministry with people of all ages. Being conversant in Cantonese or Mandarin is an advantage but not a requirement. However the ability to work and relate in a cross-cultural context is a necessity.
- This is an exciting opportunity to work together with an established committed team and further details and a Parish Profile are available from the Convener of the Ministry Settlement Board, Rev Obed Unasa (riounasa@yahoo.co.nz) or Dr Albert Ko (albertkonz@yahoo.co.nz).

ADDRESS: 105 VINCENT STREET, CBD, AUCKLAND WEBSITE: [WWW.ACPC.ORG.NZ](http://WWW.ACPC.ORG.NZ)

# Clearing the clutter

Martin Baker

**J**uliette Binoche is a beautiful French woman. She's a few years younger than me, but not a lot of years, if you know what I mean. I feel like I have grown up with her. A bit like me and Madonna, though Madonna is actually a little bit older than I am, which makes me feel quite good, in a way. I would probably go to a movie she (Juliette not Madonna) was in, simply because she was in it.

As you may know, Juliette recently won the Cannes award for best actress in the movie *Certified Copy*. So, last weekend I thought, here are two reasons to see the movie: Juliette is there and she has won best actress. Plus the reviewers on my favourite quick guide to good movies ([www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com)) gave it 90 percent.

Quelle horreurs! I should have read more closely before going. This was "an absorbing existential drama that dissects human relationships ... from legendary auteur Abbas Kiarostami". I should have taken some warning from this.

A good part of the movie was spent driving around the Tuscan countryside in Juliette's late model Ford as the bloke beside her (is it her husband or someone playing the part of being her husband? That's the existential bit) grizzles and moans about the shallowness of life and romance.

I couldn't believe it! Driving around Tuscany with Juliette beside you and all you're going to do is grizzle? It was unimaginably annoying and about as realistic as Sookie Stackhouse's discovery that one of her best friends prefers to turn into a dog before going for his evening run. (Sookie [*True Blood*] is played by New Zealand's own Anna Paquin who is a lot younger than I am and maybe our equivalent to another wonderful French actress Audrey Tatou.)

Juliette puts lipstick on, nice earrings; she takes him (husband?) back to the little hotel where they may (or may not) have spent their honeymoon. And what does he do? Complain even more about how fleeting and facile love and marriage is – and then looks at his watch and decides there is a train to catch. What?

Driving home after the movie, listening to Edward Sharp and the Magnetic Zeros (fabulous band, buy their CD) I get a text from my daughter saying how much she is enjoying using my old 35mm SLR and she has just uploaded her latest pics onto her blog spot (absofrockinglutely) or maybe it was her flickr site (the name I can't remember right now) from the 35mm (negatives onto CD) rather than using her 18MP Canon, her combined Christmas and birthday present.

I can't overemphasise enough how much I disliked *Certified Copy* – despite Juliette's starring role. But, as the name suggests, it did raise the question about authenticity. It is hardly the first movie, artwork or writing to wrestle with the challenge of identifying the real and lasting from the transient and temporal.

The next day I found myself listening to a good sermon, from John Chapter 4, about those who drink of the water Jesus gives, as never being thirsty again. The trust and credibility of scriptures rests on the point that there are things given by God that make a difference, for eternity.

Last week my agnostic friend and I both agreed over coffee (him, Havana special, trim soya latte, and me Nicaraguan blend fair trade dark roast) that things generally feel pretty unsettled at the moment. Immersed as we are, and even more so our kids, grandchildren, youth group, in a tide of brands, images, sound bites and web pages. Who can we trust and what can we believe in?

It is hard to clear the clutter. But maybe this is our moment - in our words, communities, relationships, decisions, where we bear testimony and become more deliberate in seeking first the kingdom of God.

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