

# Candour



Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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## Social Justice



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# Social Justice – Integral to the Gospel, or Something We Can Opt In or Out Of?

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

**A**re we called to believe in Jesus? ... Or are we to follow him? Increasingly this is a question echoing through Christian conversation. What does it mean to be Christian? What is God's intention? What is the Gospel? Is our purpose to escape and help others escape this world?... Or is it to see *"your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"*? Is being Christian to subscribe to a set of beliefs, doctrines... to be orthodox? Or is being Christian a way of life, a story in which we are characters blessed to join with the Creator in seeing all creation redeemed?

Throughout the New Testament we find a rule, which is one of the few New Testament rules – a golden rule – Jesus claims it sums up ALL law. Paul and James say it is... gospel.

*Love God. Love your Neighbour!*

Simple. We understand it in Sunday school, then we grow up! (There is something in the gospel about unless you become like a child...)

We are called to love God, and his Son – the supreme revelation of God. We are called to love our neighbour. Social justice is no more, or no less than the love of our neighbour – and love requires action.

Jesus, and the New Testament authors saw both as fundamental and inseparable – gospel. *"Whatever you do to the least of these, you do unto me..."*

The Church knows this, and has always known this... occasionally, we just forget. The Church is at her most powerful when the love of God is matched with love of his creation! Wilberforce, St Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther King Jr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa, St Teresa of Avila, Desmond Tutu, Popes John Paul and Francis – they all sacrificed, sometimes paying the ultimate sacrifice for social justice. All saw a vision of God's kingdom on earth, a creation redeemed, and were prepared to pay the cost for it.

At the heart of social justice is the restoration of all creation to God, heaven on earth – gospel. It is not about you or me, it is not about comfort, it is not about power – it is about God... and the least.

**A**t the heart of social justice is the restoration of all creation to God. The church needs to stand for social justice or she is not the church of Christ.

It is not about token gestures, giving so I feel good: *"Charity is not charity unless it hurts"*. (CS Lewis). The gospel of Christ is self-denial – it is about sacrifice; it is about standing in the place of the weak; it is about taking up the cross and following. In as much as Christ loved this world and gave everything for it... so must we be prepared to sacrifice for it. It may not make us popular. It may not make us safe. It may not make us grow, and it will cost! But it is right!

We need to stand for peace, and challenge our societies that so easily resort to violence and war. We need to advocate for the poor and fight the systemic injustice that enslaves them. We need to challenge the rampant consumerism that impoverishes. We need to fight for the environment of



which we are but stewards, child poverty, HIV Aids, racial inequality, sex slavery and discrimination in any form. We need to fight for the weak, the marginalised and the powerless.

We have been given much and much is required.

We need to join with all who will work with us to this end – we cannot afford to be precious. It is a matter of life. And death. *“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”* (Martin Luther King Jr)

Only the church of Christ has the power and authority to prevail against the gates of Hades. The world needs the Church to stand for social justice. The Church needs to stand for social justice or she is not the Church of Christ. A Church living with a resurrection mind-set is a Church that embraces the golden rule – love of God and love of neighbour. A Church living with a resurrection mind-set is a church moving in the mind of the risen Christ – seeking justice, righteousness and holiness for all people.

*“This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”* (1 John 3:16).

... Social justice

... Gospel

*“I believe in the people of all nations to join and to care for love. I believe in a world where light will guide us and giving us love, we will make heaven on earth.”* *I Believe* by Andrea Bocelli.

# MINISTERIAL VACANCY

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Our beloved minister is retiring and we're looking for a vibrant person to take over the vacant position. We are offering a full time Minister's position with full terms of call. Clevedon Presbyterian is a mission-focused people on a journey to the heart of God, and we're looking for someone who is passionate about God and his people, both in the church and in the Clevedon-Kawakawa Bay area. We anticipate an overlapping transition period alongside our current minister until he retires around the end of 2015.

Clevedon is a rural community where the church stands as a place of kindness, generosity and acceptance. We have a number of exciting programs running each week, and we need someone who has a vision for growing all of these different aspects of Clevedon Presy. We feel called and commissioned by God to share the gospel message and offer unconditional love to those around us and wherever God may lead us.

**We are the church where anyone is welcome.**

For more information and/or to indicate expressions of interest please contact the convenor of the Ministry settlement Board, the Rev Margaret Anne Low.

**E:** ClevedonMSB@stjp.org.nz or **P:** 09 2501764, by May 31st 2014

# The Civilly Disobedient Jesus

by John Dear S.J.\*

*[Author's note: My friend Shane Claiborne, one of the most popular progressive evangelicals in the world, asked me to write about civil disobedience for his website, [www.redletterchristians.org](http://www.redletterchristians.org), which I recommend as a great source of inspiration. I share this essay to encourage everyone on journeys with the non-violent Jesus.]*

**T**wenty years ago, on 7 Dec 1993, Philip Berrigan, Lynn Fredriksson, Bruce Friedrich and I walked on to the Seymour Johnson Air Force Base near Goldsboro, N.C., through thousands of soldiers to one of the 75 F-15E nuclear-capable fighter bombers on alert to bomb Bosnia, and each of us hammered on it. We were trying to fulfill Isaiah's commandment to "beat swords into plowshares". We were arrested, charged with two felony convictions each and faced 20 years in prison. I did about nine months in jail and a-year-and-a-half under house arrest. To this day, I'm still carefully monitored by the government, can't vote, can't visit prisoners and can't travel to several countries. This, along with my arrest record, is normal for those of us who are spending our lives in nonviolent resistance to war, injustice and nuclear weapons.

A few years after I was released from jail, I was running an inner-city community center for disenfranchised women and children in Richmond, Va. A charismatic young priest whom I greatly admired confronted me. "Are you crazy?" he asked. "Tell me really: Why did you do it?"

I could have explained how in our own history, every major movement – the abolitionists, the suffragists, the labor movement, the civil rights movement and the movement against the Vietnam War – had its breakthrough when good people broke bad laws and accepted the consequences.

I could have spoken about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," where he urges us to obey just laws and disobey unjust laws. I could have pointed to international law and the Nuremberg principles, as I have in many courtrooms before many judges, and explained that it is our duty to resist governments and break laws when they legalize mass murder or preparations for mass murder, as our government does it with its illegal nuclear arsenal.

I want to keep following Jesus all the way to the cross.

But I said simply: "I am trying to follow Jesus. Jesus was nonviolent and practiced civil disobedience and was eventually arrested, jailed and executed. I'm supposed to be his follower, and in this world of total violence, injustice, poverty, war and nuclear weapons, it seems inevitable that I, too, must engage in nonviolent civil disobedience. Most of the saints and martyrs were arrested and jailed – Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Daniel and Philip Berrigan. They probably won't kill us, but they sure will arrest and jail us if we work for justice and peace and resist war and empire. But the main thing is: I want to keep following Jesus all the way to the cross."

My friend looked at me in stunned astonishment. His mouth hung open. He was speechless. Eventually, he just whispered, "OK," and walked away.

Civil disobedience in a world of total violence, war, poverty and nuclear weapons is a way for me to follow the nonviolent, civilly disobedient Jesus. I agree with Gandhi, that great practitioner of civil disobedience, that Jesus practiced perfect nonviolence, was the greatest nonviolent resister in history, and engaged in regular civil disobedience.

Twenty years ago, I published a book called *The Sacrament of Civil Disobedience* in which I tried to look thoroughly at its theory, practice and theology. I examined civil disobedience in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, in U.S. history, in the lives of great teachers like Gandhi, King, Day and the Berrigans, and in its details – how to prepare for civil disobedience, what to expect from arrest,

**J**esus engaged in civil disobedience every single day of his public life... nearly everything he did was illegal.

trial and jail, and so forth. I also shared many of my own troublemaking experiences, including my first arrest at the Pentagon in 1984 and my arrests at military bases around the country.

But as I reviewed the history, theory and practice of civil disobedience, I remember I kept coming back to Jesus and the question of our discipleship. For years, my friends and I asked each other: 'What does it mean to take up the cross and follow Jesus?' We came to the conclusion that the cross is nonviolent resistance to the culture of war and empire; it was the natural public consequence from the state for our nonviolent civil disobedience to war and empire.

I came to the conclusion that Jesus engaged in civil disobedience every single day of his public life, that nearly everything he did was illegal, that his mere nonviolent presence was a threat to empire. I used to joke that Jesus was a one-man crime wave walking through the Roman Empire. Actually, he was even more threatening – he was a movement organizer, building a community and a movement among poor people to nonviolently resist the empire and the unjust religious system that backed it in the name of God.

As I studied the Gospels, I discovered nearly a dozen types of civil disobedience that Jesus practiced: his prophetic proclamation of the coming of God's reign and his reading from the book of Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue as subversive truth-telling that threatened the empire; touching and healing lepers, which others thought would threaten everyone's health; dining and associating with "public sinners," outcasts and the marginalized; repeatedly breaking Sabbath laws; violating the cleanliness laws and eating codes; visiting "enemy" territories and associating with the enemy (such as the Samaritans) and with violent revolutionaries (the Zealots); engaging in symbolic action and political street theater (riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and fulfilling Zechariah 9:9 about the coming of a king of peace who will end war forever); and urging people not to pay their taxes (one of the "capital crimes" for which he was "capitally punished").

Certainly the climax of his public work – even his life – was his nonviolent civil disobedience in the temple, where he turned over the tables of the money changers and prevented people from engaging in the profitable big business of organized religion. The Synoptic Gospels tell the same basic story: Jesus marched from Galilee to Jerusalem on a campaign of nonviolence like Gandhi going to the sea or King marching from Selma, Ala., and entered the temple, where the religious authorities worked in conjunction with the empire and forced the faithful to pay a hefty sum to visit God, and engaged in nonviolent direct action. He did not hit anyone, hurt anyone, kill anyone or drop any bombs, but he was not passive. He was active, provocative, dangerous, illegal and civilly disobedient, a disturber of the peace, a troublemaker, a nonviolent revolutionary who broke the unjust laws and mores of an unjust society.

This is the person we claim to follow.

The Gospel of John, written many years later, puts Jesus' civil disobedience in the temple right at the beginning of the story, just after the wedding at Cana. There, it says he made a whip of cords and drove everyone out. That is the only place in the entire Bible where this particular, obscure Greek word is mentioned; it was a specific type of rope used to lead the thousands of sheep, cattle and animals up into the enormous temple structure. He took that rope and led the animals back out of the temple. More than 1,500 years later, El Greco painted Jesus with a 20-foot whip hurting

people. That is not at all how I read the text. If anything, Jesus saved the lives of the animals as well. But the real point of placing the story at the beginning of the Gospel is its allusion to resurrection: "Destroy this temple," Jesus says, pointing to himself, "and I will raise it up in the three days."

So the Synoptics make it clear that Jesus' final civil disobedience in the temple led to his arrest a few days later, his jailing, trial and brutal execution. This is a great challenge to anyone who seriously wants to follow this Jesus. Are we willing to give our lives to resist empire, injustice and the oppression of the poor? How seriously do we want to follow him?

But there was one more final act of civil disobedience left to come: The Resurrection. The Resurrection is the greatest act of civil disobedience in all of human history.

As Daniel Berrigan once said, just as the crucifixion of Jesus was perfectly legal, so the resurrection of Jesus was totally illegal. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes this point: The Roman authorities placed guards at his tomb with the imperial seal, saying, in Dan's words, "We've killed you and we put you in the tomb and now you're dead. So stay there." But Jesus rises from the dead, breaks the imperial seal and, indeed, breaks the law that says, "Once you're dead, you're dead." His resurrection is the perfect nonviolent revolution and changes everything.

To this day, the illegally risen Jesus remains at large, out and about, forming his underground movement of nonviolence, organizing for the abolition of war, poverty, empire and nuclear weapons and for the coming of God's reign of nonviolence. Wherever people are resisting injustice and giving their lives for justice and peace, he's there.

## The Resurrection is the greatest act of civil disobedience in all of human history.

I've written much about my own experience of civil disobedience, including my prison journal, *Peace Behind Bars*. I'm fundamentally interested in practicing the nonviolence of Jesus, proclaiming his reign and practice of nonviolence and trying every nonviolent means possible to help end war, poverty and nuclear weapons. That means writing, speaking, lobbying, preaching, organizing, marching, praying, fasting, and occasionally crossing the line. From me, this is all part of modern-day, post-modern discipleship.

For the Christian working for peace and justice, and thus resisting war and injustice, means sooner or later sharing in the nonviolence and civil disobedience of Jesus.

I remember what my friend Sr. Joan Chittister wrote to me while I was in jail: "The only way peace and justice and social change happen is through our participation in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus." Amen, Sister.

That's a hard teaching but a helpful reminder. If we want to follow the nonviolent Jesus, then we'll want to make the journey from baptism to community, to understanding the Sermon on the Mount, to serving those in need, to working for justice and practicing nonviolence, and eventually, sooner or later, in such a world of war, empire and nuclear weapons, to crossing the line, engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience and risking the cross and the resurrection.

I can think of no greater blessing.

*\*About the Author: John Dear is a longtime peace activist and the author of 30 books, including Jesus the Rebel, The God of Peace, The Questions of Jesus, Living Peace, Transfiguration, Disarming the Heart, You Will Be My Witnesses, Lazarus Come Forth, and his autobiography, A Persistent Peace. He writes a weekly blog at [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org). Archbishop Desmond Tutu has nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. See: [www.johndear.org](http://www.johndear.org)*

*Source: This article has been reprinted from [www.redletterchristians.org](http://www.redletterchristians.org)*





## St Andrew's on The Terrace, Wellington

# FULL-TIME MINISTER

We are looking for a minister to lead and inspire the progressive faith community of St Andrew's on The Terrace. St Andrew's is a vibrant Presbyterian church and a spiritual, cultural and intellectual hub in central Wellington. We are looking for an energetic minister who welcomes lay participation in worship, motivates people on their faith journey, and has a strong commitment to pastoral care and outreach to the wider community.

Key attributes and skills include:

- Theological rigour and intellectual openness
- Integrity, courage and a passion for social justice
- Personal warmth and ability to build and maintain strong relationships
- Ability to communicate and connect at multiple levels

For a parish profile please contact the Convenor of the Ministry Settlement Board, Rev. Sharon Ross Ensor, [sharon.rossensor@gmail.com](mailto:sharon.rossensor@gmail.com).

We need to receive expressions of interest, including a CV and a covering letter, by 30 May 2014. You can find out more about St Andrew's at: [www.standrews.org.nz](http://www.standrews.org.nz)



# Eucharistic Justice

*By Graham and Jordan Redding, Southern Presbytery*

**T**here is a very strong link in the Bible between justice and worship. Nowhere is that link more emphatically and succinctly expressed than in Isaiah 1:12-17:

- <sup>12</sup> When you come to appear before me,  
who asked this from your hand?  
Trample my courts no more;  
<sup>13</sup> bringing offerings is futile;  
incense is an abomination to me.  
New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation —  
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.  
<sup>14</sup> Your new moons and your appointed festivals  
my soul hates;  
they have become a burden to me,  
I am weary of bearing them.  
<sup>15</sup> When you stretch out your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen;  
your hands are full of blood.  
<sup>16</sup> Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your doings  
from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil,  
<sup>17</sup> learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan,  
plead for the widow.

Reading that and many other similar biblical texts, it is clear that God expects the lives of faithful worshipers to demonstrate righteousness and justice. If they had done that, ancient Israel would have been worshipping well. But in their failure to do justice, they reveal their failure to worship.

So, too, the Church. An important thing to note here is that the pursuit of justice is not something that the Church is called to undertake *in addition* to its worship, as if the two activities run along parallel tracks. Rather, there is an interpenetration of worship and justice. They influence and inform one another. The purpose of this article is to briefly illustrate that claim in regards to the central act of Christian worship: the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist has much to remind the Church about the nature of righteousness and justice from a Christian perspective. In particular, the following six points can be made:

1. The basis for our gathering around the Lord's Table is not our own righteousness (and our ability to be just and to pursue justice), but rather the righteousness of Christ which has been bestowed upon us. As the Apostle Paul put it in his second letter to the Corinthians, "For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). John Calvin talked about this in terms of a wonderful exchange:

*"This is the wonderful exchange which, out of His measureless benevolence, Jesus Christ has made with us; that, becoming Son of Man with us, He has made us sons of God with Him; that, by His descent to earth, He has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, He has conferred His immortality upon us; that, accepting our weakness, He has strengthened us by His power;*

*that, receiving our poverty unto Himself, He has transferred His wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon Himself, He has clothed us with His righteousness" (Institutes of the Christian Religion IV. xvii. 2)*

2. As Paul also makes clear in that same Corinthian passage, the righteousness that God bestows upon us in Christ flows from a prior act of reconciliation:

*"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us a ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor 5:17-19)*

In Christ there is an inseparable link between righteousness/justice and reconciliation. Justice, so conceived, is not an end in itself. Neither is it a mere balancing of rights, the pursuit of fairness, the meting out of punishment, and/or the acceptance of the eye-for-an-eye-and-tooth-for-a-tooth mentality. Rather, justice serves a higher goal of reconciliation. The restorative justice movement understands this purpose very well.

3. Through the Eucharist, the Church's economy – or way of being in the world – is incorporated into God's economy as Father, Son, and Spirit. In this economy, judgement ceases to be an enforcement of human laws, systems and hierarchies. Instead, our judge, Jesus Christ, stands also as our brother and representative. In him, by the advocacy of the Spirit, we are adopted as daughters and sons into God's family. Rather than a top-down imposition, justice takes on *perichoretic* form, inviting us into God's communion of love.
4. The fact that the Eucharist is not only a meal of remembrance but is also the foretaste of a heavenly banquet reminds us that justice and righteousness have a strongly eschatological dimension. It is precisely the vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1-4) that encourages us to imagine new ways of being in relationship with one another. It is this which led Paul to make the remarkable declaration in his letter to the Galatians that *"as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:27-28). In making that declaration Paul was fully aware of the myriad forms of oppression and injustice that arose from the deep social and political inequalities in society between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free persons, men and women. But as far as he was concerned, these things were all part of the old creation that is passing away. They have no place in the new creation that has begun in Christ. And because they have no place in the new creation, they have no place around the Lord's Table.
5. The gathering of a new humanity in Christ (the second Adam) takes its bearings from the new creation, not the old. Indeed, as Paul also wrote in his letter to the Corinthians:

*"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor 5:16-17)*

Justice, so conceived, entails looking beyond the categories, the stereotypes and the labels of an old-creation mindset, imagining a new future, and striving to make that envisioned future a present reality.

Those who hold onto this vision of justice will almost certainly be accused of being naive and out of touch with the real world, but what is at stake here is who defines reality and who stands to gain from that definition.

No doubt Isaiah's vision of a world where *"the wolf shall live with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid"* (Isaiah 11:6) could be dismissed as being equally naive and out of touch, yet it was precisely that sort of vision that sustained hope and kept an exiled people alert to the possibility of a new beginning, which many of them subsequently recognised in the person of Christ. Another way of putting this is to say that the Church is a resurrection community, and as such it is inherently hopeful, and marches to the beat of a different drum to that of the world.

6. It is in the Eucharist that the foolishness of the Cross, which is nothing less than the wisdom of God (1Cor 1:18-25) is experienced afresh, both personally and as a community. It is this logic that opens the Church's eyes to see its crucified and risen Lord embracing the vulnerable, the poor and downtrodden of our world, and compels it to do likewise in His name. This is the logic of the Beatitudes, the logic of suffering love, the logic of a prayer that says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". It puts us on the alert to the seductive wiles of the Tempter who, as he did with our Lord, tempted him with promises of power and influence. It reminds us that when the pursuit of justice is yoked to the pursuit of power then the former will almost certainly be corrupted by the latter. History is replete with examples of the oppressed becoming the oppressor.
7. In the extravagance of Eucharistic hospitality, social justice is constituted by the overflow of thanksgiving and donation. When the woman anoints Jesus at Bethany, the disciples cannot fathom the unmerited extravagance of the woman's beautiful action. The aesthetic is pitted against the ethical: *"This ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor"* (Mark 14:5) However, in Christ, the beauty of God is not separated from the plight of the oppressed but, rather, meets it at the cross and seeks to transform it. *"Much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many,"* Paul writes in Romans. Christ's cup overflows. It cannot be contained. Worship cannot be separated from social justice because, around the Table, our own cups are not only filled but spill over, creating life and community. In thanksgiving, extravagance and beauty is found, and cannot help but give back. It does not need a utilitarian reason. It is merely for love.
8. The Eucharistic elements of bread and wine, which represent a combination of earth's fruitfulness and human labour, remind us that we have an obligation to pursue justice not just for human beings but for the earth also. Both are in need of healing. Moreover, the bread reminds us of the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," which in turn instils in us an ethic of simplicity as we recognise our reliance on God for the basic necessities of life – much like the ancient Israelites' reliance upon God for daily manna in the wilderness.

It is a sad truth that much injustice in our world arises from an abandonment of this ethic of simplicity. It manifests itself in acts of aggression and greed, in the assertion of power and in the unleashing of our base human impulses (which Paul lists in some detail in his letters). By way of contrast, a biblical ethic of simplicity reminds us of what is important, and encourages us to find joy, gratitude and contentment in the simple things of life. It is very easy to feel aggrieved and to claim an injustice in regards to what we don't have, but an ethic of simplicity reminds us that in many situations justice might best be served not by demanding what we feel we are due but by letting go of the non-essentials and the desires that are associated with them. How hard it is to learn this lesson in our consumerist culture, in which extravagant beauty is equated with self-gratifying luxury? But in the Eucharist, the paradox of extravagance and simplicity are held together in the self-giving extravagance of God's love.

In her remarkable book, *Take This Bread*, Sara Miles describes the experience of early one morning in New York, for no earthly reason, wandering into a church, receiving communion, and finding herself transformed – embracing a faith she had once scorned. Before long, she turned the bread she ate at communion into tons of groceries, piled at the foot of the church's communion table to be given away. Within a few years, she and the people she served had started nearly a dozen food pantries in the poorest parts of their city. Social justice was seen to be Eucharistic justice. As Sara Miles testified:

*"What I found wasn't about angels, or going to church, or trying to be 'good' in a pious, idealized way. It wasn't about arguing a doctrine...or pledging blind allegiance to a denomination. I was, as the prophet said, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. I found it at the eternal and material core of Christianity: body, blood, bread, wine poured out freely, shared by all. I discovered a religion rooted in the most ordinary yet subversive practice: a dinner table where everyone is welcome, where the poor, the despised and the outcasts are honored."*

St David's Union Church, Ashburton

# DYNAMIC FULL TIME MINISTRY POSITION



We are seeking a minister who can bring a broad spectrum of skills and gifts to lead us to the next stage of our faith journey.

They will...

- Be keen to encourage with sound Biblical teaching
- Have a thirst for community mission
- Share the pastoral needs of our people

For more information and Parish Profile,  
please contact Rev Rodney Routledge: [jen-rod@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jen-rod@xtra.co.nz)

Closing date now extended to 30th June 2014.

[www.st-davids.org.nz](http://www.st-davids.org.nz)



# A Ministry of Song

Gaynor McCartney, Kaimai Presbytery

**This is the story of a distinguished New Zealand hymn writer and composer who has been creating hymns for the current social concerns of remote New Zealand towns and the workshops that have brought him there.**

In 2010 St Andrew's Church in Te Kuiti agreed to host a workshop with Colin Gibson teaching New Zealand hymns. The parish did the local organisation and I discovered what was involved in organising the workshop. To help fund it and share more widely we repeated the workshop in St Luke's Church at Bellblock in Taranaki. This occasion, expected to be a 'one-off,' was a huge success, showing that we were filling a real need and could manage such workshops both locally and further afield.

We formed These Hills Workshops ([www.thesehillsworkshops.wordpress.com](http://www.thesehillsworkshops.wordpress.com)) to bring quality Christian music and experienced art tutors into our more remote areas. It has always been ecumenical and donation-based so that these interesting and enjoyable events could be widely shared.

We now concentrate on organising a four-workshop tour each year, taking Colin Gibson to Waikato/ King Country (2011), Northland/ Auckland (2012), Southland (2013), and this year to Auckland, Tokoroa, Opotiki, and Thames. He teaches the songs and tells their stories.

For every workshop we do, I write a local verse for Colin's well-known hymn "These hills where the hawk flies lonely" (*Faith Forever Singing*, 63). The key lines of the hymn are "These are our care" and "These are our prayer". I focus on things that make the area special to the people there, things that say, "This song is about our place. God is here and cares about us". I ask host parishes to tell me about the area and community. For me, an outsider, the internet can give the impression of the district's landscape, beaches and rivers, but reveals very little about the life of the district.

What are the things that really matter to locals? Specific landscape features, local events, folklore or political actions that cause distress or bring great joy? This year, two of our host communities are experiencing major social adjustments: a change from forestry to dairying, and the controversy between mining and environmental issues.

**Modern hymn writers and their songs can bring a sense of God's presence and show God at work in the here and now.**

These have inspired Colin to write a special song for each area. He will be teaching all of them at each workshop, because although they are written to specific situations they can be applied to many other places. He has taken the actual situation and stripped it down to the essential cause, and written to address that cause.

I am especially excited about this tour. It is the first time that so much has been discovered about our host districts and their needs, so Colin has written hymns especially for them. This also shows how modern hymn writers and their songs can bring a sense of God's presence and show God at work in the here and now.

We had never imagined that our little group of ordinary parishioners would be going beyond our area, yet in only five years we have discovered a number of deep social concerns and produced hymns directly addressing them.

Can you imagine how it feels to have a tune named after your town, a song written for you and taught by an internationally acclaimed composer/writer? These workshops have become a means of showing that God does indeed care for small and isolated rural communities, as well as the larger and better-resourced Christian communities in towns and cities.

For over forty years Colin Gibson and other New Zealand hymn writers have been creating songs and hymns in our own language idiom and imagery, songs that are relevant to New Zealanders. Many of these texts address justice and social issues, dealing with real contemporary social problems or taking the sting out of controversies and allowing civil discussions between members of opposing factions, as does Colin's "We are many, we are one" (*Faith Forever Singing*, 67).

The New Zealand Hymnbook Trust has produced four hymn books totalling about 450 hymns/songs: *Alleluia Aotearoa* (1993), *Carol Our Christmas* (1996), *Faith Forever Singing* (2000), and *Hope is Our Song* (2009). Each book is accompanied by a selection recorded on CD. You'll find alphabetical song-lists at <http://www.nz-hymns.come2see.co.nz/Songlist.A-B.html> and those included on CDs at [http://www.nz-hymns.come2see.co.nz/Songs\\_on\\_CDs.html](http://www.nz-hymns.come2see.co.nz/Songs_on_CDs.html)

Colin Gibson is currently writing a companion to all the New Zealand Hymnbook Trust publications, supplying histories of the hymns and biographies of their composers and writers. Titled *Knowing the Song*, it is expected to be published in 2015.

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# Hearing the Cry

*Jono Ryan, Southern Presbytery*

**F**or me, the discovery took place ten years ago while I was living in Vancouver's neglected Downtown Eastside and studying for my theological degree. With a fellow student, I had moved into the centre of this neighbourhood of derelict buildings, where we lived in a rooming house of eighty residents. It wasn't the first time I'd encountered significant poverty, but until this point, I suppose I'd considered issues of social justice to be a sort of extra-curricular activity for Christians, something that was related to, but separate from, our core business of proclaiming the gospel.

However, amidst the bleakness of life in this part of the city, I began to wonder what hope such a gospel might offer here. Thousands of residents were living in cramped and inadequate housing, with thousands more sleeping rough in alleyways and secluded park corners. Prostitution and hard drug use was prevalent, and on the streets, you could see human lives wasting away as a consequence.

This startling picture was exacerbated by the dramatic inequality in the city; while the Downtown Eastside was known as "Canada's poorest postal code", the wealthiest postal code in the country was said to be only fifteen minutes drive away. Each morning, as I left my rooming house, and walked the block to the bus stop, I'd pass people panhandling along the sidewalk. As I boarded my bus and commuted to the seminary at the other end of town, my questions about the hope of the gospel in such a neighbourhood began to be more searching.

My small apartment room was located on the top floor of our building. Despite the sub-standard living conditions, it offered a privileged view of the cityscape. I had pushed my desk up against the old sash window, and it was here that much of my learning and reflection took place.

I can recall mornings sitting here, watching the sun rising over the city, and discovering God anew in the Scriptures. In the Exodus story, I found a God who heard the groaning of his people in oppression. The Psalms offered me songs that spoke of God raising up the poor. I discovered surprisingly pertinent social critiques in the words of the prophets. In the gospels, I began to pay more attention to the ministry of Jesus, noting that while forgiving the sins of those at the margins, he was also healing and restoring them, and challenging the sources of their oppression. And in the promise of God's kingdom, I began to find a hope that could extend even to my neighbours in this setting.

It was an exciting time, as I felt myself being drawn deeper into the biblical narrative, and encountering a God who was not indifferent to the desperate circumstances of my neighbours, but rather who had seen their misery, heard their cry, knew their suffering, and desired to deliver them (Exod 3:7-8).

I began to realise that, if God's heart is filled with compassion for the poor and burns with indignation at their oppression, then I could no longer regard such concerns as an optional hobby for Christians. To love this God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength would also mean loving the ones that God loves – learning to love these neighbours as myself.

"Is social justice part of our church's mission?" I would have deliberated over that question once. However, having heard Jesus proclaim his gospel of good news to the poor, release for the captives, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18), I now find it impossible to imagine a gospel that might exclude these concerns. Moreover, I struggle to understand what might motivate us to argue otherwise.

Clearly, the social context of the Downtown Eastside played an important part in shaping my understanding at that time. However, many of these same concerns of poverty, inequality and injustice play out in our communities in New Zealand too, albeit on a different scale.

If we are able to consider the question, "Is social justice part of our church's mission?" at arm's length, then it may be that we are in a position of luxury; perhaps our lives do not depend on it. However, the livelihood of many in our communities is determined in no small degree by issues of social justice. Almost each week in the media, we hear of parents who can't afford healthy food for their families; children growing up in cold, damp housing; those on a minimum wage that just can't cover the basic bills. If each Sunday we worship a God who is attentive to the cry of these ones, then surely we must be attentive also.

# Pope Francis: Untying the Knots

By Paul Vallely

*Reviewed by Mike Crowl, Southern Presbytery*

**V**allely is a freelance journalist who has also worked for a number of major newspapers. His book on Jorge Bergoglio – now Pope Francis – is meticulous in its detail, generous in its viewpoints, and an altogether thorough summing-up of the man's life so far. It's not a biography as such, but it has plenty of biographical detail. Its main aim is to reveal how the Pope who apparently came from nowhere, has lived his life in Argentina for the previous seven decades, and how that life contributed to his eventual election as Pope.

Vallely has interviewed the Pope's friends, co-workers, enemies and detractors in his attempt to uncover how Bergoglio ticks, which has been eminently successful. He never diminishes the Catholic and Christian background to the story and many of the anecdotes and quotes show how Bergoglio's faith provides a strong foundation to his daily work.

Bergoglio was brought up in a Catholic home, in which he was strongly influenced by his faith-filled grandmother. An excellent scholar and conscientious worker, he felt drawn to a vocation in the priesthood, and ultimately joined that most rigorous of orders, the Jesuits. With his sharp intellect and strong leadership skills, he quickly rose up the ranks. But at some point – a change which Vallely discusses in detail – he focused more on humility than power, and this focus has continued as time has gone on.

He has always been an innovator, a man with a heart for the poor and for those needing justice, even though in his earlier years he was often accused of being too conservative. He has eschewed the pomp and shows of wealth that have beset the Catholic Church and he makes a habit of living simply. This has not changed since he became Pope, and he has quickly made a number of changes within the Vatican and in regard to the papal lifestyle.

**T**here's a good deal to reflect on, not least his emphasis on justice, humility and mission.

The late 1970s "Dirty War" – a dark period in Argentina's history – affected Bergoglio's reputation, and brought accusations on his head. Supposedly he didn't aid those struggling against the regime as well as he might: two Jesuit priests who were captured and tortured (but survived), claimed he hadn't tried to help them at all. Vallely has dug beneath the surface of the accusations, and while Bergoglio himself admits he failed some people at this time, it's clear that behind the scenes he was working hard to keep as many people as he could from being captured, tortured and killed. More than once in the book, Bergoglio is quoted as saying that not only does he ask forgiveness for the sins and offences he might have committed, he asks forgiveness for the sins and offences that he did indeed commit. He never denies his failings.

I copied out a number of passages from the book, either words spoken by Bergoglio, or by others speaking about him. There's a good deal to reflect on, not least his emphasis on justice, humility and mission. Here is a pastor who sees the need for the Church to go out to the people rather than requiring them to come in. He is a man who sees priests and lay people as equal saints in the family of God. He is a man who is happy to spend time with ordinary people as well as those in authority. It's not surprising he's made a big impression on a world looking for truth in religion.

Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) 227 pp. ISBN: 978-1472903709



# John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer

By John W. de Gruchy

*Reviewed by Jason Garoncy, Southern Presbytery*

**J**ohn de Gruchy's little book on John Calvin is a great read! One of its real achievements is that its author has succeeded, in a little over 200 pages, in capturing something of Calvin's spirit and energy.

It is certainly no hagiography – de Gruchy is not shy to point out those areas where paradox exists in his subject, and where he thinks that the reformer simply got it wrong! In an honest effort to introduce one of the most important figures in Western intellectual, theological and social history, the book picks up some themes that marked and gave anatomy to Calvin's work.

De Gruchy is especially keen to retrieve Calvin and the tradition that exists most consciously in his wake as constructive expressions of Christian humanism, a movement of social transformation that is at once liberating, ecumenical and humanising.

Writing with a non-technical style, and out of his own experience of witnessing both the beauty and the ugliness of the reformed project played out in his native South Africa, de Gruchy builds a compelling case for why we should take Calvin's thought seriously. De Gruchy believes Calvin's thought can be used as a resource for what it means today to engage in the public commons, and for encouraging the kind of flourishing of human society that God desires.

Certainly not everything in Calvin's thought lends itself to such a project, but there is much that does, and these are the features that de Gruchy identifies and develops. He concludes his study by offering six affirmations about Christian humanism and its public vision. They bear repeating and thinking about as a way into considering Calvin's own vision and its portability today. They are:

**First**, Christian humanism is inclusive in its vision of humanity. It recognises that being human is our primary identity – coming before those of religion, race, culture, social class or gender.

**Second**, Christian humanism affirms both the God-given dignity of being human and the concomitant responsibility of being human. Given human brokenness, it understands the gospel as God's way of restoring human dignity and awakening our responsibility for the world in which we live.

**Third**, Christian humanism is open to knowledge and insight from wherever truth is to be found, but it draws most deeply from the Christian Scriptures and the long history of their interpretation through the centuries, embodied in what is called Christian tradition.

**Fourth**, Christian humanism insists that love of God is inseparable from love for others; that faith and discipleship belong together; that theology and ethics are part of the same enterprise, and that the renewal of church life and public life are intrinsically connected.

**Fifth**, Christian humanism places justice, good governance, ecological responsibility and global well-being above national and sectional interests. It is concerned to ensure that scientific and technological development serve the common good and the well-being of the earth.

**Sixth**, Christian humanism encourages human creativity and cherishes beauty. It insists that goodness, truth and beauty are inseparable, though distinct. Just as it places a premium on moral values and the search for truth, it also regards the development of aesthetic values and sensitivity through the arts as essential for human well-being.

I warmly and enthusiastically commend this book, particularly for those for whom Calvin remains something of a persona non grata, or an embarrassing (or worse!) spokesperson for the Christian faith, and for those who wish to gain a clearer sense of the world-embracing vision of the reformed project at its best.

John W. de Gruchy, *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013) ISBN: 978-1-62032-773-9. 240pp.

# Book Reviewers Needed

**I**f 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*. Please don’t send an unsolicited review to the editor.

**Jason has received the following suitable books and if you would like to review any of these volumes, please contact him at: [jasongoroncy@gmail.com](mailto:jasongoroncy@gmail.com): or [jgoroncy@knoxcollege.ac.nz](mailto:jgoroncy@knoxcollege.ac.nz)**

Maurice Andrew, *Dramatic Encounters in the Bible*

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Clive Ayre, *Earth, Faith and Mission: The Theology and Practice of Earthcare*

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

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters to London: Bonhoeffer’s Previously Unpublished Correspondence with Ernst Cromwell, 1935–1936*.

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Neil Darragh, *But Is It Fair?: Faith Communities and Social Justice*

---

Noel Due, *Seeing God as Father*

---

Cornelius Ernst, *Multiple Echo Explorations in Theology*

---

Diana Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*

---

Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ, Expanded and Updated Edition*

---

Jason Goroncy (ed) *Descending on Humanity and Intervening in History: Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of P. T. Forsyth*

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

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

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Kate Malcolm, *Pastorale*

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Peter Matheson, *Argula von Grumbach (1492–1554/7): A Woman before Her Time*.

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William R. McAlpine, *Four Essential Loves: Heart Readiness for Leadership and Ministry*

---

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

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# Are we part of the problem?

*Martin Baker, Assembly Executive Secretary*

**T**he old fish says to the young fish, “The water’s nice today,” and the young fish asks, “What is water?” When do you and I get the opportunity to stand back from being immersed in the day-to-day dealings of our private and public lives and, for want of a better word, evaluate where things are going for ourselves?

Perhaps that is a strange question to ask in a publication whose theme focuses on issues of social justice. However, I have now sat through enough seminars on leadership to know that while what you and I do might be part of the solution; we can also be a big part of the problem.

Some challenges are difficult to talk about. They seem almost counter-intuitive. Take the fact that a succession of studies indicates that the world is a whole lot less violent place than it used to be. We are significantly less likely to be the victim of violent crime than we were a few years ago, and it is much less likely that we, or someone we love, will be killed because of our involvement in armed conflict.

Harvard psychology professor, Dr Steven Pinker writes, “Today we may be living in the most peaceful era in our species’ existence”. He acknowledges: “In a century that began with 9/11, Iraq, and Darfur, the claim that we are living in an unusually peaceful time may strike you as somewhere between hallucinatory and obscene”.

**T**oday we may be living in the most peaceful era in our species’ existence.

While Pinker acknowledges that wars make headlines, he and other researchers provide substantial evidence that there are fewer conflicts today, and wars do not kill as many people as they did in the Middle Ages.

Research commissioned by the Economist also backs up Pinker’s assertions that global rates of violent crime have plummeted in the last few decades. The rise of education and a growing willingness to put ourselves in the shoes of others as well as the burgeoning of democracy and far more sophisticated methods of criminal investigation have all played their part.

However, the one stand-out exception for me in this good news is the research by the Pew Research Centre, which indicates that religious hostility reached a six-year high in 2012.

In an article referred to on the Alternet website, Sam Harris who is the author of *Letter to a Christian Nation*, observes, “Faith inspires violence in two ways. First, people often kill other human beings because they believe the creator of the universe wants them to do it... Second, far greater numbers of people fall into conflict with one another because they define their moral community on the basis of their religious affiliation: Muslims side with Muslims, Protestants with Protestants, and Catholics with Catholics”.

I am not sure how you respond to this, but these trends seem to me to be a troubling indictment on the Christian church. While the world becomes a better, safer place, religious differences and their related beliefs appear to be the cause of record levels of violence.

How do we live with that?

Without getting involved in too much unhealthy self-recrimination, how do we as the ministers and elders of our Church engage with the possibility that what we do and what we teach, how we worship and live, might be part of the problem?

Research indicates that religious hostility reached a six-year high in 2012.

While neither I, nor any of my colleagues that I know of, are planning to launch an attack on some religious (or other) group, perhaps, sometimes the influences that eventually lead to violence against another are rather more subtle.

I am not sure, but I do think we influence and impact those around us and in our wider community, in a multitude of obvious and less obvious ways: how we see those who are different, how our church hospitality includes some and excludes others, how our teaching from Scripture picks up on our favourite themes, the groups we donate money to, and even how we interact with the media.

Sometimes, for example, when I hear prayers of intercession on Sundays in church, while they seem to refer to so many worthy things – peace, kindness, the poor and so on – it seems to me that they are often not grounded in the specifics of human suffering and injustice. The people who die in Syria have names and families, the Muslims killed by Christians in the Sudan (and vice versa) will be missed and mourned terribly by those close to them. Our prayers, in their conceptual loftiness, appear to me to often sanitise the pain of the world and, by doing so, stand in such contrast to the Jesus who immersed himself in the realities of human sinfulness and suffering.

“Authenticity” is the quality that researchers identify in those who seek a community in which to explore their own faith. The honesty with which we reflect on our own religious practices, the impact these practices have on the people and world around us, how we ground the implications of Christ’s call to follow him in our commitment to the stranger and the outcast, remain at the heart of our mission together.



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