

Q&A: Do you think you're cool?

Anonymous asks: Do you think you're cool?

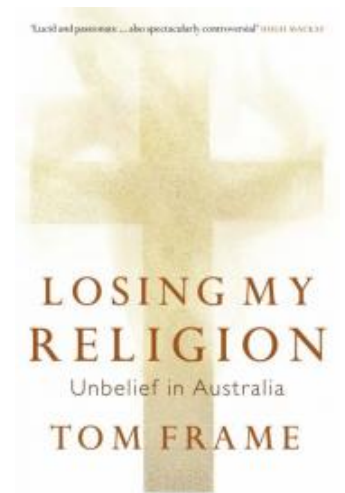
My answer: No, but my kids are. Perhaps that makes me cool by association.

(Ask me anything)

Review: Two books by Tom Frame #2 – Losing My Religion

Losing My Religion is the second Tom Frame book I have read recently. The title says it all – it's about "Unbelief in Australia."

Frame is a bishop in the Anglican Church and the head of a theological institution and this book is a passionate attempt to understand the context of his church and his gospel. With the long-term prevalence of anti or non-religious sentiment in Australian society, and it's growing impact, it is a worthy examination.



In this sense, this book is not an apology for the Christian faith as much as it is a consideration of that which the Christian faith must interact with or make a defense to. He sets out his agenda clearly; to give the background or context for unbelief in Australia, to examine the causes of unbelief and "the reasons for the loss of religious beliefs in

Australia", and finally the "consequences of unbelief" (Page 7).

Perhaps wary of the critiques he will receive from positive atheists and other more militant nonbelievers (not that I've come across any review from an obviously anti-theistic point of view, pointers welcome in the comments) Frame spends a significant amount of time defining his terms – "faith", "belief", "disbelief", "unbelief", positive and negative atheism and anti-theism etc. This is a necessary precursor to examining statistics and other background material about the extent of unbelief in Australia. It is also extremely useful to cut across the grand sweeping statements that abound in this area about the death of religion (on the one hand) or the up and coming rise of the religious right (on the other hand). Some myths are dispelled simply by knowing what you're talking about.

The section on the causes of unbelief is also very useful. His broad overviews are excellent introductions to history – the rise and fall of different philosophies and their impact, the various characters in the development of science and how they are taken today. It is good solid stuff and for the most part quite objective. It is only in the examination of the theological response to unbelief (characterised as "confusion and incoherence") that you do sense some of the passion he has for the church to get this engagement right.

If this book is controversial (as Hugh Mackay's imprimatur on the cover says) I think that controversy rests in his section on the "consequences" of unbelief. He attacks the so-called New Atheists (Dawkins, Hitchens et al.) – whom he calls anti-theists – not so much for their position, but for their attitude. He finds that this intolerance infects not just intellectual debates but the whole concept of secularism in a way that corrupts true plurality and makes it a form of tyranny.

“I want to conclude this discussion of tolerance by highlighting my concern that changing attitudes towards religious beliefs will have a bearing on attitudes towards all beliefs in Australia. When it becomes acceptable, even admirable, to mock and ridicule a person’s religious convictions and customs – especially when the intention is to provoke an indignant reaction – the next step is to prohibit the expression of religious sentiments in all public places and forums. This has been the approach of the French Government in recent years and there are signs that Australia is poised to do likewise under the guise of promoting social cohesion and cultural harmony. Citizens are free to hold religious beliefs and to act on them, but only in their personal lives and only within their homes. Once religion is completely privatised, the next step usually involves incursions on freedom of conscience and obstructions to the right of free association. We are some way from this kind of tyranny but it must be recognised that movements in this direction are usually incremental... I believe that contemporary anti-theism has some of the characteristics of fundamentalism and, like all fundamentalisms, needs to be opposed.” (Pages 267-268)

Frame therefore calls for a genuine secularism in Australia.

He also calls for a genuine church that can engage within this freedom, not presuming belief, not using coercion, but taking its place in the market place of ideas and so exhibiting a genuine spirituality with a substantial kerygma.

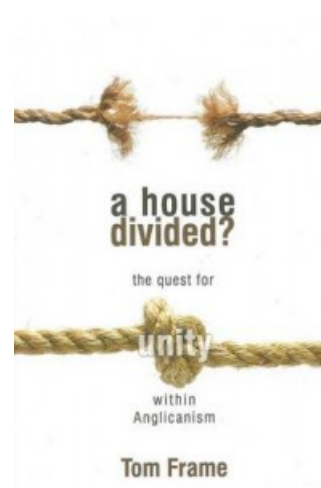
This is a unique book. It mixes polemic with vulnerability, precision with impassioned argument. It is prophetic for both church and world. For those who are persistent in their derision, it will be ignored. For others it will provide food for thought and a basis for conversation. In that sense it lives out what it envisions – a genuine engagement.

My only concern is that it is a bit too “meta” – a book about

books, an idea about ideas. It doesn't so much argue the gospel of Christ but for the *space* for the gospel of Christ. That's no bad thing though, and the question of how to fill that space, how to preach the gospel well in the light of unbelief, is a whole new task.

Review: Two books by Tom Frame #1 – A House Divided?

I've just read the two most recent books by Australian Anglican author, Bp. Tom Frame of St. Mark's National Theological Centre in Canberra. One book is an examination of unbelief in Australia, and conversely the other is an examination of a denomination in Australia. Frame brings analysis, rhetoric and a touch of polemic to both topics



I read the most recent first. *A House Divided?* is subtitled “the quest for unity within Anglicanism.” It is both an apology and a critique. Although the critique is sometimes more prevalent there is no questioning Frame’s motivation which is unashamedly reformational. At both the beginning and the end of the book:

“In the face of growing anti-Christian sentiment, the time has come for the Anglican Church to declare what it believes and to determine the limits of diversity; to divest itself of the institutional baggage that drains its members of so much energy and enthusiasm; and, to shed much of its antiquated Victorian accoutrement and stifling English mindset... In this

set of essays I want to identify what is ailing the Anglican Church of Australia; to explain why parts of the Church have become diseased; to advise against persisting with policies and practices deleterious to its well-being; to prescribe changes to its common life in order that it might regain health; to suggest actions and attitudes what will promote vibrant mission and ministry, so that the Church will be able to face some of the challenges rising before it over the next 30 years.” (Page 3)

“While those who are obsessed with preserving structures and processes will disappear and those who are transfixed by the need to dispense with difficult beliefs and unpopular doctrines will fade from view, the remaining Anglicans will constitute a remnant and their task will be to rebuild the Anglican edifice from the ruins of secularised faith and the rubble of compromised theology... The rebuilding will take decades but whatever arises from the ground will have better foundations, more solid walls and look more authentically Australian... I hope to live long enough to see this new Church and to rejoice in the grace of God that built it.” (Pages 289-290)

I confess that such motivation moves me and resonates with my own commitment to Anglicanism.

Frame's analysis takes him through a consideration of Evangelicalism, Anglo-Catholicism, and Liberalism in the Anglican Church. He gives the strengths and weaknesses of both yet he is not academically dispassionate about it. In fact Frame looks determine to deliberately inhabit the unhappy centre, understanding everyone, but not closely aligned with anyone. It's a lonely place to be. I can admire that. The only thing lacking from his analysis is to consider the Charismatic renewal in the Anglican Church – a renewal that transcends the other three categories in a way that he doesn't engage with substantially.

The axe is taken to the root of some Anglican holy cows – the characteristics of our episcopacy, the operation of our synods. I can respect his view that episcopal orders should inhere to diocesan oversight – and he uses himself as an example of someone who has such a discordant title. I would counter by arguing that he himself is actually an example of how episcopal leadership is greater than diocesan administration. (And gently point out that he is wearing an episocopal shirt on the back cover).

The global Anglican situation is not overlooked. My (mostly online) observations from afar have lead me to a similar conclusion that I might call “redemptive cynicism” a sense of knowing that it’s finished, amicably handling what remains, and not being nervous about the unknown future. I have previously extended hope to the possibility of the Covenant bringing remedy, reduced that hope to the chance of bringing amicable divorce, and, since last year, reduced it even further. I can agree with Frame that “in all likelihood, it will not even go close to achieving its stated goals.” I agree with this position:

“I am naturally disappointed that the high level of organisational unity achieved within the Communion has subsided but I see no reason to be despondent. The time and energy devoted to preserving the fractured remains of the Communion over the past five years has not paid any dividends. An attempt was needed because something valuable was at stake. But this attempt failed because the dissenting parties felt they would gain more by going it alone than continuing in the company of those with whom they disagreed... Anglicans will hereafter be described by their ‘network’ affiliation or some other label disclosing the theological tradition to which they belong. This reflects the reality that the Church has a ‘natural’ community of its own, a community that is intrinsic to the kind of decisions it needs to make about its life and witness.” (Page 87, emphasis

added).

The third part of the book breaks out of a stream of argument and delivers a series of stand-alone essays. While useful in and of themselves I think they are something of a distraction and actually weaken the thrust of the reformational polemic.

A shorter harder-hitting book would be more powerful I think.

I have heard this book criticised for being ranty. I'm not sure if it is but part of me doesn't care if it is.

Reformation needs personal charisma as long as it is constructive and spins a vision to aim for. There were times when I felt Frame was not tilting at the windmill that I would personally prefer him to. And some of the final chapter on "Moving Forward" (the main place where negative criticism turns into positive vision) seems a bit abstract and disconnected from a real plan or substantial agenda. But so what? It fired me up. It made me think about the world and the church and renewed the fire in my belly to see these old ecclesiastical bones bearing real flesh once more.

Distilling worship

I ended a recent post with these words: "[It is best] to begin with *worship* and actively work from there, by his grace alone, all the way to the end." Which is all well, and good, but what is *worship*? Where *do* I begin?



, or



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What I'm going to do here is a bit of an exercise in biblical distillation. Using the ESV bible, and with the help of a Bible Dictionary or two, and google, let's shake around the word "worship" in Scripture and see what concepts condense before us. This is not precise, but it useful.

The word "worship" itself is so ethereal and intangible. Broad definitions like the ubiquitous "giving worth to – *worthship*" are not particularly helpful. So the first step is to see what **practices** are attached to or associated with worship.

In the earliest place where "worship" is mentioned in the (ESV) Bible, Genesis 22, Abraham intends to worship by killing something and burning it. In the last book of the Bible worship is expressed by falling down at someone's feet (albeit, before an angel- Rev 22:8) before the last mention (Rev 22:9) which is simply a command – "Worship God." What else is involved or associated with worship?

In between this first and last account a quick word search across the ESV gives us a list of practices where worship is associated with:

1. **Posture** [1-hide]

- bowing of head. [hide]Gen 24:26, 48; Exod 4:31, 12:21, 34:8; 2 Kgs 5:18; 2 Chr 7:3, 29:29-30; Neh 8:6; Ps 95:6; Heb 11:21[/hide]
- standing (rising up). [hide]Exod 33:10[/hide]
- falling down / prostration. [hide]Jos 5:14, 2 Chr 20:18; Job 1:20; Is 44:15, 17, 46:6; Dan 3:5-7, 10-11, 14; Mt 2:11, 4:9, 28:9; Acts 10:25; 1 Cor 14:25; Rev 4:10, 5:14, 7:11, 11:16, 19:10, 22:8[/hide]
- kneeling [hide]Ps 95:6.[/hide]
- direction of face. [hide]Ezek 8:16[/hide][[/1-hide]]

2. Some form of **proclamation** that... [1-hide]

- “blesses” God [hide]Gen 24:48[/hide]
- “ascribes glory” to God [hide]1 Chr 16:29, Phil 3:3[/hide]
- “gives thanks” to God [hide]2 Chr 7:3[/hide]
- “glorifies” or “declares God’s name” [hide]Ps 86:9, Ps 102:22[/hide]
- declares God’s characteristics [hide]2 Chr 7:3; Rev 4:10, 13:4[/hide]
- “exalts” [hide]Ps 99:5, 9[/hide]
- is prayer and petition [hide]Is 44:17; Lk 2:37[/hide]
- acknowledges God’s status [hide]Mt 14:33; Jn 9:38[/hide]
- “praises” God [hide]Rev 19:4[/hide][[/1-hide]]

3. **Sacrifice** [1-hide]

- of an animal. [hide]Exod 32:8; 1 Sam 1:3; 2 Chr 29:28, 29, 32:12; Ezra 4:2; Is 19:21; Acts 7:42[/hide]
- of a gift, firstfruit or other general offering. [hide]Dt 26:10; 1 Chr 16:29; 2 Chr 25:14; Is 19:21; Jer 1:6; Ezek 46:2; Mt 2:11[/hide]
- of worship itself as “offering” [hide]2 Sam 15:8[/hide]
- of ourselves as “living sacrifice” – [hide]Rom 12:1[/hide][[/1-hide]]

4. **Service** (often negatively, serving other gods). [1-hide] [hide]Dt 8:19, 11:16, 17:3, 29:26, 30:17; 1 Kgs

9:6, 9, 16:31, 22:53; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 21; 2 Chr 7:19, 22; 2 Chr 33:3; Jer 8:2, 13:10, 16:11, 22:9, 25:6; Dan 3:12, 14, 18, 28; 4:10; *Lk 4:8, Rom 1:25**[/hide]*

– vow-making *[hide]*Is 19:21*[/hide]*

– obedience *[hide]*1 Kgs 11:33*[/hide]**[/1-hide]*

5. Temple or **location**. *[1-hide]**[hide]*1 Sam 1:3; 2 Sam 15:32; 2 Kgs 18:22, 19:37; 2 Chr 32:12; Ps 99:9; Ps 132:7; Is 27:13, 36:7; Jer 26:2; Ezek46:2; Zech 14:16-17; *Jn 4:20; Acts 7:7, 8:27, 24:11; Heb 9:1; Rev 11:1**[/hide]*

-location superseded – *[hide]*Jn 4:21*[/hide]**[/1-hide]*

6. Some form of **transcendence** *[1-hide]*

– in the “splendour of holiness” *[hide]*1 Chr 16:29; Ps 29:2, 96:9*[/hide]*

– in the “glory of the Lord” *[hide]*2 Chr 7:3*[/hide]*

-“before” God / in his presence. *[hide]*Ps 22:27; Is 66:23*[/hide]*

– with “reverence and awe” *[hide]*Heb 12:28*[/hide]**[/1-hide]*

7. **Singing & music** *[hide]*2 Chr 29:28; Ps 66:4; 86:9*[/hide]*

8. **Seasons & times** *[1-hide]*

– Passover *[hide]*Ezra 6:21*[/hide]*

– Feast of Booths *[hide]*Zech 14:16*[/hide]*

– Feasts in general *[hide]*Ezek 46:9; Jn 12:20*[/hide]**[/1-hide]*

9. **Fasting** *[hide]*Lk 2:37; Acts 13:2*[/hide]*

10. **Self-reflection** *[1-hide]*

– confession. *[hide]*Neh 9:3*[/hide]*

– seeking. *[hide]*Jer 8:2*[/hide]**[/1-hide]*

11. **God-given** identity or ability *[1-hide]*

– “in spirit and in truth” *[hide]*Jn 4:23-24*[/hide]*

– Israel’s identity *[hide]*Rom 9:4*[/hide]**[/1-hide]*

12. **Prohibition** of certain acts *[1-hide]*

– unatoned sin or uncleanness *[hide]*1 Sam 15:25, Ezra 6:21; *Jn 9:31**[/hide]*

– idols. *[hide]*Dt 12:4; Ps 97:7; Ps 106:19; Is 2:20; Is 44:15; Ezek 20:32; Acts 7:43; Rev 9:20*[/hide]*

– human sacrifice. [hide]Dt 12:31[/hide][[/1-hide]

13. A **general reference** to “worship” [hide]Exod 24:1, 34:14; Jos 22:25; Jdg 7:15; 1 Sam 1:19, 28; 2 Sam 12:20, Ps 22:29, Is 19:23, Mt 2:2, 8, 15:9, 28:17; Mk 7:7; Lk 4:7, 24:52; Jn 4:22; Acts 17:23, 18:13, 19:27, 24:14, 26:7, 27:23; Col 2:18; 2 Thess 2:4; Heb 1:6, 9:21; Rev 13:8, 12, 15, 14:7, 9, 15:4, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4, 22:3, 22:9[/hide]

That’s quite a diversity, but it gives us access to the next step – a **lexical** distillation. What are the underlying words for worship that attach to these practices? For instance, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* doesn’t have “Worship” as a standalone entry but subsumes it into “Prayer, Ask, Kneel, Beg, Worship, Knock” and “Serve, Deacon, Worship” – which are aspects clearly evident in the word search above.

It gives us access to some ancient Greek words. We have worship as...

- **gonypeteō** – means to “kneel down before.” The word alludes to the submission of subjects or vassals to their High King. It expresses a sense of awe in the recognition of might and sovereignty. It’s about paying homage, giving *undivided* loyalty. It also has the sense of throwing oneself on the mercy of the court – it is an acknowledgement of grace and so can reflect repentance, reliance and absolute trust or faith. It can be both deliberate, or impassioned – falling to one’s needs in a sense of desperation.
- **proskyneō** – means, literally, “to kiss” but has a broader meaning now. Like *gonypeteo* it also reflects posture – kneeling or prostration, and attitude – reverence and humility. It often translates the widely found OT Hebrew *šāḥāh* which means much the same but perhaps even more amplified – “cowering” perhaps, certainly “bowing to the will” of the one so adored.

It's used a lot in Revelation where it is strongly associated with the voice of God's people singing adoration. So much so that the singing of these songs, which are "constantly finding new title of dignity with which to praise God, and ascribing to him the most exalted merits and attributes... [such that]... human petitions and thanksgivings merely fade away into silence" ("Proskyneō" in *New International Dictionary of Theology*, Vol. 2)) is *proskyneō*, worship, in it's own right.

- **latreuō** – picks up the sense of worshiping God through service. It has simple connotations of employed labour.

It often translates the widely found OT Hebrew 'ābad which can mean "work" in general, of the good sort as found in Eden. It is about liturgical service, in temple or tabernacle, but is not about the specific tasks of priests but the underlying obedience to God by all the people because of his grace. It extends so far as to refer to the inner worship of the heart by faith.

This is especially so in the light of the gospel where the work (*latreia*) of salvation done by Christ fulfills the strictly religious obligations that foreshadowed the atonement in Christ.

Our distillate of worship is this. Worship is...

Submission, Surrendered Adoration, and Service

And so to begin with worship is to begin with these things. These are things we can *do*.

Submission is a choice. It is the attitude of "Let not my will, but yours be done" not in some fatalistic sense, but in the determination to override the inclinations of our own

selfishness. In this way submission is freedom from the tyranny of other's expectations – free to serve as a God-given gift rather than obligation. It is a choice to *follow* and to learn God's ways. It involves learning, reading, devotion, study. It involves obedience to the Word of God. So the inward devotion is directed towards outward action. This necessitates prayer and petition, sacrifice and discipline. All this is worship that begins with submission.

Surrendered Adoration is also a choice. It's an allowing of God to have his way in with and through us. It's a response to God's movement with voice and words – acknowledgement and declaration. Here we lift voices in praise, both privately and corporately. We set aside times and places to devote attention to hear him and proclaim him. We sing, we dance, we delight, we catch, and express, a glimpse of what heaven will be like. All this is worship.

Service is a choice. It's a choice to expend energy, sacrificing time, effort and inclination for the sake of God and his people. Service is God-ordained work and can be of the most "secular" kind. All people can worship God in their work, glorifying God in their human industry. Service sets the aims of God in front and seeks to further them. It is often outward focussed and so notices the things God notices – many of the gifts of the Spirit are for the furthering of this form of worship.

If we distil this yet further we get the basic condensate of worship – **Jesus himself.**

Jesus worships.

It is in the essence of who he is and what he does. Indeed "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." ((Jn 5:19)) One could argue that mutual worship is at the heart of the trinitarian

relationship, it's certainly there in the economic trinity as the incarnate Son of God relates to his Father. And it is Paul who tells us that it is by the same Spirit of Christ by which we, too, can have a life that cries out "Abba, Father." ((Romans 8:15))

In the end, God helps us worship. As he must – or else our wandering eyes and selfish inclinations cause us to worship easier things, or turn our adoration into striven religion.

Lord Christ, help us worship you, in spirit and in truth. And so manifest your glory in our lives.

Amen.

Responsibility and Grace

There are a number of causes that lie behind ministers and pastors burning out, hitting the wall, breaking down, or generally flaming (or shaming) out. Underlying these causes are issues of human frailty, sin, insecurity and depravity.



A significant example of this is the tendency for ministers to overextend their concept of responsibility to the point where they are carrying burdens that don't belong to them, and so collapse. To illustrate, consider the following recount of a conversation I had with a mental health professional recently...

Him: "Your organisation seems remarkably well set up to handle cases of burnout and breakdown."

Me: "I think that is due to it having some experience in this

area. In fact the prevalence of clergy breakdown is high across all denominations..."

Him: "Why is that? What are the churches doing wrong?"

Me: "I don't necessarily think it comes from expectations placed by church hierarchy or even from the grassroots (although that is more common), I think it usually comes from self-imposed expectations by most pastors."

Him: "What are they?"

Me: "Those associated with the world's worst job description – 'Go and change the world.' How on earth do you set KPI's and SMART goals for that!???"

Here's the rub for many of us ministers. We do deal with eternal matters. We are about interacting with the broad eschatological arcs of history and applying them in the broken, hard, confusing here-and-now. Without that the task would be nothing but some form of insipid civic chaplaincy, at best.

But how is a temporal person expected to further such eternal things? Does the responsibility for the Kingdom of God lay upon our shoulders?

It's not like there isn't a biblical mandate for stretching our arms wide, thinking big and reaching long. Consider two popular biblical commissions that have energised many, including myself:

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Mt 18:19-20a)

"...I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage –

with great patience and careful instruction... keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” (2 Tim 4:1b,2,5)

And it's not like there's any pretense that it's going to be easy. Paul, for instance, exemplifies something of the pastoral reality when he corrects (with only a hint of sarcasm) the spiritual pride of the Corinthians:

“We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world... I urge you to imitate me.” (1 Cor 4:10-14, 16)

All this is stuff that we are charged with doing, energy and cost that we are called to bear as ministers of the gospel. It is unashamedly, and in the Bible often quite literally, a calling for martyrs. (The word, in the broadest sense, simply means “witness”, a martyr bears witness to the truth even to the end.) To have passion for the gospel is to be passionate for Jesus and so share his Passion. This means that ministry involves suffering, as Paul says:

“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.” (Col 1:24-26)

So, is this what ministry is all about – responsibility for the application of eternity, commitment to whatever affliction and suffering is necessary?

Perhaps, yes, for it's an answer that *looks* like Jesus, and we are called to imitate him.

But it's an answer that is missing one thing – Jesus himself.

The picture of ministry, if concluded at this point, would be concluded too early. And the result, I contend, is despair and burnout.

The thought process in this incomplete picture runs like this:

- The minister has been charged with ministry.
- The responsibility for ministry lies with the minister – whose job it is to do the baptizing, the teaching, the preaching, the correcting, the rebuking, the encouraging, etc. – if you like, the bringing of the Kingdom of God.
- When the ministry lacks fruit (as it always will in certain seasons of consolidation or testing) or misses some non-biblical, human-imposed KPI (e.g. something nonsensical like percentage growth in attendance) then this must be because the minister has not baptized, taught, preached, corrected, rebuked, or encouraged, etc. well.
- The answer is to push harder, suffer more, embrace weariness as a friend, and push on in affliction, do everything yourself, etc.

Such a thought process is often internal to the minister and fueled by an over-developed sense of duty or responsibility, and in recent times amongst younger generations by an overdeveloped sense of machoism.

But it misses Jesus.

It may be a picture that is patterned on Jesus, but it actually ignores him or replaces him.

It misses the point.

The point of ministry is never the minister, it is God.

The heart of ministry is not affliction, it is grace.

We need a more complete picture. Which, unsurprisingly, is actually the picture that the Bible provides. Consider the words of commission listed above, this time with some words of context:

“All authority in heaven on earth has been given to me. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28:18-20)

“In the presence of God and of Christ who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction... keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” (2 Tim 4:1-5)

The task is not “Do ministry” it is “Given that Christ is real and present, minister with him.”

And so Paul can write about doing “everything *through him* who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13) and “struggling with all *his* energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col 1:29). And when it comes to affliction he looks only to “suffering *by the power of God*, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own

purpose and grace.” (2 Tim 8b-9). He is echoed in the lives of the early church fathers – people like Polycarp – who would deliberately avoid affliction and martyrdom where they could because it was seen not as something to run towards but as a grace to receive if, and only if, it is given and empowered by God.

In other words, without the power of God, without his energy, without Christ’s strength – in short, without *grace* – ministry is simply human, sin-ridden, frail and emotionally deadly.

Without the specific call of God, suffering is the fruit of sin and pride, and the grace is for it to be dealt with or remedied, not embraced.

And those who are in ministry (which is all of us, right?) would do best not to begin with ourselves, on human responsibility and human agenda; but to begin with worship and actively work from there, by his grace alone, all the way to the end.

Hope in the Night

I came across Andrew Peterson a little while ago and recently downloaded his album “Counting Stars.” Peterson is a wordsmith and it shows in his songs. Their strength is their lyrics. I have found them to be extremely useful in my ongoing quest to have a more doxological life.

Currently my preference is for more declarative lyrics – worship in the sense of “Holy God, you are like this...” But if you are going to get personal and reflective this is how you do it, connecting to God and the arcs of salvation history:

In the Night

Andrew Peterson

I am weary with the pain of Jacob's wrestling
In the darkness with the Fear, in the darkness with the Fear
But he met the morning wounded with a blessing
So in the night my hope lives on

When Elisha woke surrounded by the forces
Of the enemies of God, the enemies of God
He saw the hills aflame with angels on their horses
So in the night my hope lives on

I see the slave that toils beneath the yoke unyielding
And I can hear the captive groan, hear the captive groan
For some hand to stay the whip his foe is wielding
Still in the night my hope lives on

I see the armies of the enemy approaching
And the people driven, trembling, to the shore
But a doorway through the waters now is opening
So in the night my hope lives on

Like the son who thought he'd gone beyond forgiveness,
Too ashamed to lift his head—but if he could lift his head
He would see his father running from a distance
In the night my hope lives on

I can see the crowd of men retreating
As he stands between the woman and their stones
And if mercy in his holy heart is beating
Then in the night my hope lives on

I remember how they scorned the son of Mary
He was gentle as a lamb, gentle as a lamb
He was beaten, he was crucified, and buried
And in the night, my hope was gone

But the rulers of earth could not control Him
They did not take his life—he laid it down

All the chains of death could never hope to hold Him
So in the night my hope lives on

I can see the Son of Man descending
And the sword He swings is brighter than the dawn
And the gates of Hell will never stand against Him
So in the night my hope lives on

Q&A: What are alternative(s) to the iPad that you would personally approve?

Asked by Anonymous, referencing my article <http://briggs.id.au/jour/2010/01/why-i-dont-like-the-apple-ipad/> and also asking, "Does this opinion also include the iPod?"

I haven't (yet) looked for Android pad-like devices. But I might begin somewhere like this: <http://www.androidpads.com/>

As mentioned in the article my complaint has very little to do with the device itself but the marketing-and-control mechanism behind it. That includes the iPod, iPhone and all things iOS-y.

You may also want to read my recent article: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/2011/01/corporatism/>

Q&A: Miscellanea

Well, it does say "Ask me anything"!

Not all questions will find their way to having a post of their own. Some, which I think are frivolous or significantly irrelevant or obviously spam etc. will be ignored. Others will be lumped together in occasional "Miscellanea" posts like this one.

1) Anonymous asks: Can you enlighten me as to the idea behind these "Daily" on-line publications such as this one (<http://paper.li/ozdj/gadgetsandgeekery>) I have three or so on my subscriptions.

It seems to me that these are the internet equivalent of your Women's Weekly or other specialist magazine. Or perhaps the internet equivalent of Infomercials and Direct TV Shopping. I don't rate them as particularly valueable.

[Update: Having been prompted by a friend I have since taken a closer look at the top level <http://paper.li> site and the machinery behind the site makes use of social networking in a way that it is actually a lot more of a web-of-trust site (below) than the commercial-collation analogy (above). I review it [here](#).]

The philosophy behind keeping the internet useful is not about the amount of information that's out there but the trustworthiness of the information that's out there. Sites like this (and many blogs) do little more than collate and arrange information from other places. If they do this well and link to information that is useful and reliable then they are a good addition to your web of trust.

Having had a look at the link you reference, I can't say it's something that would appeal to me particularly.

2) Anonymous asks: I am wondering why I can access a portable Wi-Fi hotspot in some places? In particular for a great many miles out from Launceston/Deloraine where there are no houses/buildings in sight.

Three possibilities:

- 1) Are there phones and other portable devices in sight?
Particularly on public transport someone may have set their phone up as a wifi hotspot so as to share their 3G connection with their laptop or their friends.
- 2) Many phones will detect an open network when passing a motel or coffee shop etc. and will then display the notification for some time, long after you have passed by.
- 3) There are suggestions that topographical anomalies in that area can induce an interference pattern so that access points located in the near-equilateral triangle referencing Launceston, Elizabeth Town, and Poatina can experience near random and sudden increases in amplification. □