

Can the New Perspective be a New Apologia?

In my current role I get to spend a lot of time at the interaction between public discourse, the thought-life and momenta of culture, and the application of Christian theology and devotion. It's a muddled space to play with a lot of speaking at cross purposes and a fast reducing amount of common ground.



I've reached a point of both frustration and passion.

The frustration comes from the level of misunderstanding and presumption that exists, particularly about how others view Christians and Christian thought. Our philosophical framework is ignored, our motivations are questioned, and our ambitions rejected. This is very understandable. As a friend of mine articulated to me recently "We Christians are like bad students. The world is asking the same questions, and being frustrated by its same lack of answers, and we come along and say 'The answer is JAY-sus.' And we don't bother to show our working."

"We don't bother to show our working." Yep. And ouch.

Over the ages there have been those that seek to show our "working out." These are the *apologists* (from the word *apologia* which means 'a formal written defense of one's opinions or conduct' which is synonymous with *apology* but you can't use that because it sounds like you're sorry for something...) And so the "first" apologist, Justin Martyr, showed his "working out" of the reasonableness (in both the moral and logical sense) Christianity in a context while

defending against some common misunderstandings of Christians.

Many centuries later on we have those that defend against the rationalism and modernist experiment of the Enlightenment.

And more recently some engagement with postmodernity (although I find many of these are delivering an apology for modernity, not Christianity, but that's another topic...)

I am simply not satisfied with the depths of our current apologia. A *defense* is a *responsive* exercise that is necessarily shaped by the context and the audience. We either ignore that context and audience and do the stereotypical bible bash; or we misunderstand our context and audience to the point of being rendered irrelevant.

So I am thirsty to *understand* our context. I've been reading some books that have engaged with philosophical theories that were fomenting in the mid 20th Century. The little I could quickly grasp gave me that "aha" moment: "*This* is where they are coming from, this is why they are saying, doing, teaching this and that. *This* is how they hear us when we say..." etc. etc.

So my resolution is this: **To learn more.** I want to join in with the unpacking of the Western World philosophically (and perhaps sociologically). I want to read a book a week from the ***top ten primary sources that have shaped or describe the Western World.***

Any recommendations?

Similarly, the passion, derives from an utter commitment that the gospel is, well, good news. And remains so. I have always aspired to be as kerygmatic (from the word *kerygma* which means 'proclamation') as possible. The gospel is gospel only when it is proclaimed. The gospel demands kerygma.

Effective kerygma is thus a combination of hermeneutic, homiletic, and applied ethics in which the gospel connects and enlivens the surrounding context.

In recent times the best kerygma I have witnessed (in my slight reading) has come from the school of thought that has been tagged as the “New Perspectives on Paul.” This is the stuff of Krister Stendahl and N.T. Wright and in my mind speaks to a framework that is high levels of realism. It emphasises community and activity, not simply as conceptual responses to revelational truth, but as innate fundamentals of divine historical interaction with the world.

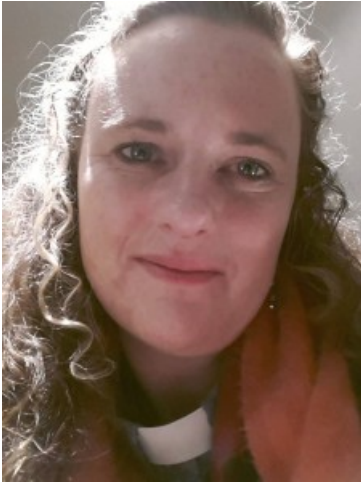
My hunch is that there is an apologetic connection between New Perspectives and the currents of Western thinking which has not yet been fully explored – but could bear fruit if it was.

I want to see if this is true. **I want to learn more.** I want to read a book a week ***from the top ten expositions New Perspectives commentary.***

Any recommendations?

I’ll let you know how it goes.

**Let everything that has
breath (in honour of Gillian
Briggs)**



*Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.
(Psalm 146:1-2)*

This is Gillian Briggs. It's her facebook profile pic so I'm sure she won't mind me posting it here.

Today Gill turns 40. She enters her fifth decade. And judging by the sunrise this morning it is going to be an awesome one. She married me 18 years ago almost-to-the-day. I win ☐

The thing is, we almost didn't get married. Not because of anything relational, but because we almost didn't meet. Gill almost didn't reach decade number three. Twenty years ago complications with surgery almost took her from us.

There's a story she tells from that period of her life in which she was starkly faced with only having a finite number of breaths left. She tells of the resolve that Psalm 146 brought to her: *I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.* And Psalm 150 says it too: *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!*

I have had the privilege of walking next to Gill and having

her walk next to me for many years now. I have heard her troubled breaths, pain-filled breaths, laugh-filled breaths, weeping breaths, contented and relaxed breaths and downright frustrated breaths! But I listen to them, and I learn from them (when I'm not being a fool). Because each one of them has something that points me to divine truth and God's heart and therefore to life itself.

If you know me you will have heard me say that I admire Gill, and when asked to sum up that admiration I give two inadequate but accurate words: tenacity and vivacity. Gill is tenacious and vivacious. It's what happens when you have praise-filled breaths.

The tenacity is strength. Yes, sometimes it's stubbornness and immovability. But mostly it's just-keep-going-ness. It's more aware than blind perseverance; it's an unwillingness to close the eyes and descend into darkness, and to be able to respond when the heartbeat of God and hope break in when darkness does envelope. It's that sense of "this isn't good enough" that refuses to be content with injustice and half-heartedness and looks for gold when others think they have it right with lumps of lead.

The vivacity is beauty and life. Yes, sometimes it flashes with passionate anger. But mostly it's a glow that fills the home, lightens hearts, and wakes people up. It can be fierce – what I see and hear when I wake up to hear music or singing, and I know that she is kicking down some darkness inside her or around her. But it's also warm, a cloud of understanding and discernment, and place of rest and connection for others, with someone who just "get's it" and knows how to speak life.

I would like to bear witness to Gill's strength. These last four decades have not been easy. Many are yet to see the fullness of the gift God has given to us all in her. I'm sure there is more adversity and difficulty to come – although I long for a season of release when she, and I, get to rise up

on some wings together. But I also know that Gill is finding her voice, or perhaps finding a *renewed* voice (because she has always had one), and through it we will all be blessed by her tenacity and vivacity.

Today, on her birthday, Gill is singing with the Southern Gospel Choir in a combined performance with world-acclaimed grammy-award-winning acapella group *Take 6*.

Today, on her birthday, with every breath, Gill is praising the Lord.

It is very very right.

Hobart Coffee Rankings 2013

Last time I ranked the coffee experiences of Hobart I was very new in town, a lot less experienced in coffee, and some of the decent coffee shops in Hobart had only just opened. Here is a long overdue update.



These are subjective rankings, based on varying combinations of flat white/short black/piccolo/macchiato. I tend to choose single origin as it demonstrates both the taste of the barista and how much they care. I look for flavour, texture, aesthetic and, to a lesser extent, the environment of the shop.

Feel the love people, no disparagement intended, just an articulation of appreciation.

This post may get updated as I remember things.

Tier Two

Tier two coffee shops are where I go for a decent drinkable coffee, when I am looking for a place that is convenient (nearby), comfortable, and conducive to conversation.

Coffee-wise, I expect a decent coffee on a par with what I can make at home. A “high tier two” shop can provide an enjoyable flat white, but not anything black. A “low tier two” may require resorting to a mocha. If I have to add sugar the coffee has dipped into tier three.

In this tier:

Atlas is definitely high tier two, a good solid flat white on one of the busiest pedestrian corners in the city. Staff friendly, welcoming and have a good memory for faces and names. A little noisy at times.

YOL0 in Macquarie is nearby to me and is a comfortable place to have a chat. Flat whites are decent, but I enjoy the mocha more. Nothing amazing, but if you’re with a group of friends that don’t care too much about coffee, this is a reasonable option.

[Update 11/5/13 – POP Cafe in Collins is conveniently located for my walk back from the gym on Thursday mornings and includes suitable brekky munchies. A pleasant coffee – staid standard beans but very well extracted.]

Tier One

Tier one coffee shops are basically the shops that are really worth going to. Coffee is their reason for existence. They know their coffee, will have a standard blend and one or two single origins and demonstrate significant skill in extracting

each roast to maximise its characteristics.

Honourable mentions in this category include the newly found Zimmah in Murray Street. The barista seems to be something of a long-standing barista mentor. He clearly emphasises strength and depth in his extraction, to the point of risking bitterness but winning the bet. This shop may be the first to replicate the Melbournian “unmarked excellence hidden down an alleyway” style.

A second honourable mention goes to Villino in Criterion Street. Villino was an early standard-setter in the Hobart coffee scene and has not fallen off its pedestal. A good range of beans ready to go with some decent nibblies. They have recently expanded to include Ecrú as a hole-in-the-wall takeaway which I have not sampled. It did seem a little strange to expand in that direction as Villino itself is not particularly spacious, in fact it can be quite cramped. They lose some kudos from me for having a \$10 minimum on the EFTPOS – grrrrrr.

I have two number ones. Both have been around for about 18 months – the same amount of time I have been in Hobart. Both started strong and have improved over those months. Each has its own strengths.

If you were to ask me, “what is the best coffee you’ve ever had in Hobart”, I would have to give it to Yellow Bernard. YB is very close to my office. Barista Scott is less scientist and more artful magician. Standard is high and on occasions I have been handed a triple-shot single origin flat white that has simply blown me away – often with an emphasis on the fruity zing at the front and the chocolately body.

YB’s pretty much sells nothing but coffee and they are excelling at it. They are working their brand well.

If you were to ask me “what is the best coffee shop in Hobart”, I would have to give it to Pilgrim. The standard is

exceptional and consistent. Barista Will (and his colleagues) have won awards, and rightly so. Will is more the precision engineer and has taught me about brew ratios and other extracting principles. The latte art is extraordinary and award winning – for me good art is icing on the caffeinated cake. The location is a nice 5-10 minutes walk for me, so it gets me off my butt. The ambience, while often busy with medicos from the nearby hospital, is rarely overwhelming and it's a great place for a conversation.

[Update: The extension, Property Of: Pilgrim is now open. And it's awesome. Get the Caveman. Just do it.]

Pilgrim are expanding soon, it will be great to see where they take it.

Q&A: What is the practical role of recent retired people in the church?

Big Bad Wolf asks: *What is the practical role of recent retired people in the church? Stacking chairs and serving cups of tea?*

Hi Wolf,

Is there some personal hurt behind your question? I would understand if there was because I have come across churches where the retired/older people are relegated to (what might sometimes be considered to be) menial or trivial tasks, and this is hurtful. So there might be a question behind your question.

But to interact with your question as it stands...

A church, like any organised community, takes a lot of energy to run. If people are to be blessed, particularly newcomers, then there is a necessary reliance on people putting their hand up to serve the community in many various ways. This includes stacking chairs and serving cups of tea!

So, there is no reason why a recently retired person should be excluded from acts of service, if they are willing and able.

I have come across many recently retired people who have delighted to serve the church in such a way, and have valued the fact that they can carry some of that load while they have the energy and the freedom from caring for children etc. that may not be afforded to others. Let us not denigrate the necessity, importance, and value of those so-called menial tasks of service and those that volunteer for them. As someone who has reached the end of service to be faced with 100 chairs to pack up, having someone say, "Will, I'll do that" is such a relief and a blessing, truly soothing. I value it greatly.

But perhaps your question implies an "only" – is that the "only" role for the recently retired? Absolutely not! Each member of the body is gifted according to the Spirit one to another so as to build the people of God and further the gospel. The task of the church is to encourage everyone, regardless of their age, towards ongoing maturity and the wise application of their gifts and talents.

However, if there is one direction that I would, generally speaking, encourage the "recently retired" to particularly explore, it is the task of mentoring. The age group you refer to have a particular wealth of experience and knowledge to gift the church with. If they can be involved in some way, large or small with the ongoing task of identifying, apprenticing, releasing and commissioning newer leaders they will have blessed God's people and produced much fruit for his

glory in that way, and it may be a useful framework for their direct hands-on ministry.

Thanks for the question,

W.

Hobart Coffee Rankings

[Update: In response to some feedback I have updated this post to include an experience of Pilgrim Coffee in Argyle Street. I was also asked to clarify what I meant by “purely subjective results”]

Having worked in the Hobart CBD for the best part of three weeks my coffee shop rankings are currently as follows.

Based on the purely subjective results of ordering “Give me the fattest, strongest, largest flat white that you can give me.”

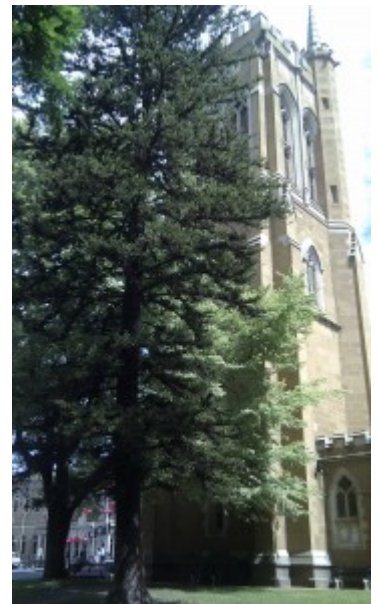
1. **Villino Espresso | Pilgrim Coffee** – Both gave me a full-flavoured coffee that had adequate strength of taste and kick with no bitterness or burn. The temperature and texture was perfect for both. Villino’s hit the belly a little softer, Pilgrim have a better, larger venue. Equal first.
2. **Yellow Bernard** – A nicely balanced flavour but a bit too much froth. Very close to my work so they will be visited again.
3. **Jam Jar Lounge** Battery Point (coffee is sourced from Villino) – Very decent, nice and strong but a little over extracted.
4. **Oomph** Macquarie St – A little insipid in flavour –

perhaps a little stale? Pleasant enough, but nothing spectacular.

5. **Dev'Lish** – Strong but very very bitter and landed like lead.
6. **Hudson** in Murray Street – I was shouted a “coffee” at a lunch meeting. The conversation was good.

Bound for South Tasmania

Bishop John has announced that I am to be appointed as the new Senior Associate Priest of St David's Cathedral and as his Research Assistant.



He writes, “Please pray for Will and Gill and their children as they make their move from Burnie to Hobart in August and as they settle in to a new place and new season of their lives”, and we would echo that request. There is much to do by way of logistics and organising schooling and accommodation etc down south as well as getting our house ready to leave here in Somerset. Please especially pray as we leave the Connections and Burnie church communities and connect with those at the Cathedral and in Hobart. In all this we have already seen

much of the grace of God in sovereign providential provision and all manner of generosity and for that we are most thankful.

I am looking forward to working with the Dean of Hobart, The Very Reverend and most excellent Richard Humphrey who has a strong vision for the ministry of the cathedral in the city of Hobart. The opportunity to assist Bishop John as he leads the prophetic voice of the church in the community is also a privilege. Gill will continue as an honorary deacon and shape her ministry around the opportunities that become apparent.

We will be leaving Burnie with some sadness, of course. There are wonderful people and an awesome community here, many of whom have been with us and us with them through thick and thin and ups and downs. We arrived eight and half years ago, when we were in our twenties, with only the first three of our four children. This is where I made many first steps in ministry, and many mistakes, and learned much. We have walked through some fire and times of pain, but also times of excitement, passion and purpose. We rejoice in all that God has done, through Connections Church in particular, as well as the other places we have ministered. We look forward to what God will do through his people on the North West Coast. In everything there is a testimony of God's grace which we will never be able to forget.

So, onward Christian soldiers! With our eyes on him, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Evangelical Examination of

Conscience

For those with a Roman Catholic heritage an *Examination of Conscience* may be familiar. It's a series of questions, often based on the Ten Commandments or some form of catechism, which you are meant to ask of yourself before going to confession: Have I committed this or that sin? Have I had that wrong attitude? Where is my heart not right with God?



Being lumped together with confession it's something the evangelical church has shied away from. And not for no reason – at its worst, when mixed with penance instead of penitence an examination of conscience could be taken as a desperate attempt to unearth every wrongdoing in order to avoid the wrath of a vengeful god.

But at its best, when done in the light of the God of justice and mercy in whom forgiveness is a rock-solid given because of the cross of Christ, it is an act of devotion, a humble willingness to have oneself shaped for the Kingdom of God.

This is a thoroughly evangelical practice in line with the psalmist of Psalm 139:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

In this I agree with David Gushee from a 2005 Christianity Today article where he sees in such examinations a “rich moral inventory” and decries the “staggering moral sloppiness that frequently characterises us” as evangelicals. And he asks:

Which evangelical traditions today train their adherents in the kind of rigorous self-examination represented by the Catholic tradition of the “examination of conscience”? The

Puritans and the followers of Wesley used to engage in such practices, but they have largely disappeared.

Which evangelical traditions today encourage the kind of daily self-examination and rigorous accountability represented by the evangelical Wilberforce? Can one find this kind of moral seriousness actively taught in any branch of the evangelical world?

Christianity is more than an event, an experience, or a set of beliefs. It is a way of life characterized by moral seriousness and the quest for holiness.

I recently put together an Examination of Conscience for an Ash Wednesday service. I did this by looking at a whole bunch of different resources, most of them catholic, and picking the good questions without losing the hard questions. It has been a worthwhile exercise.

Marriage Anthem

My wife and I recently celebrated our fifteenth wedding anniversary. Which is cool and fantastic. And then today she found this video. It says it all. Perfectly. **Absolutely freaking perfectly.**



The Resurrector



Recently I posted an article on the facebook group Club Theo < and a member quoted me, writing:

Hi Will, I like what you said here:

“The resurrection can thus be seen the Father’s act to honour the son’s act of self-sacrifice – and to bring not only Christ, but all those he counts as “his” – into a place of new life and authority.”

What verses/ideas did this flow out of? I’d not heard it put this way before, but it rings true to me. (perhaps a new discussion is now born??)

Well, here’s some thoughts-on-the-fly and a bit of a biblical cherry-pick. I would like, at some point, to do this properly, dip into the greek etc., but for now I’ll do what time allows.

There’s two points to make:

1. That the resurrection is primarily the act of the Father.
2. The act of the Father is, at least to some degree, a *response* to Christ’s act on the cross.

If these two points are true then we have an insight into that wonderful phrase (hinted in an entry in my Connections blog): “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom 4:25).

So here goes:

There are lots and lots of places where Jesus foretells the resurrection in the passive – e.g. “...until the Son of Man is raised” (Mt 17:9). See also Mt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 26:32; Mk 14:28; Lk 9:22. And also after the resurrection the simple descriptions are also in the passive – “He has been raised from the dead” (Mt 28:7). See also Mk 16:6; Lk 24:6; Jn 2:22; Jn 21:14. The implication is that the Father, or at least “God” is the active participant in the resurrection.

In Acts we have many similar simple descriptions – but we also start seeing some *reason* being ascribed. Consider:

Acts 2:23-24 – This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”

Although the reason for the “impossibility” for the hold of death is not given, there is at least a sense that God’s action to raise Christ was a right thing to do, not an arbitrary thing to do. [For further consideration: implications of the quote from Psalm 16 in Acts 2:25-28, it is quoted again in Acts 13:34-35 where the “reason” for the resurrection is related to a fulfillment of covenantal promise]

The Pauline epistles, especially Romans, also use the passive “raised” and Paul is quick to apply the resurrection to us as *part* of the justification process:

Romans 6:4 – “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Romans 8 is probably my favourite chapter in Scripture and contains the wonderfully trinitarian reference to “the

Spirit", "the Spirit of God" "the Spirit of Christ" and "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead" (Rom 8:9-11). Galatians 1:1 specifies, explicitly, that it is the Father who is the "raiser."

In the letter to the Hebrews we, once again, see some reason/cause or purpose to the Father's actions:

Hebrews 2:9 – "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

In the end (and I've probably missed a whole heap of passages – so feel free to point them out to me), I think this famous passage sums it up:

Philippians 2:8-9 – "... he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..."

In this well-known "hymn" the cross and it's death is an act of the Son's self-sacrifice and obedience – and the resurrection is an act of God – who "exalted" him and a response "therefore." [For further consideration – exact nature of the "therefore" in the greek.]

Perhaps I can conclude with something of a blessing:

Heb 13:20-21 – May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleaseing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen

