

## SUMMER EVENT STIRS EXCITEMENT ABOUT NAAC FUTURE



In late June we had a very successful gathering in Chicago called "Stirring the Waters", the first joint conference sponsored by NAAC and our friends of the Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission (APLM). Thanks to my "partner in crime" Jay Koyle (APLM President) for his work in leading our planning team, and all who helped make it a great event, especially our registrar Devra Betts. Some 65 people from the US and Canada were in attendance and enjoyed three provocative speakers, inspirational worship, and great fellowship. The evaluations from the event were overwhelmingly positive and most were in agreement that our two organizations should again conspire for

another gathering in the future.

The NAAC Board of Directors held its annual face-to-face meeting in Chicago during the June event. A couple of significant results include the following. First, the board accepted an invitation from St. John Episcopal in Portsmouth, VA for a catechumenate training event to be held late September 2014. Second, we had a rich phone conversation with Jim Schellman, outgoing Executive Director for the North American Forum (our Roman Catholic counterpart). He shared that the forum would cease offering training events due to lack of demand and funding issues, and was winding down its operations this summer. As NAAC is seeing increasing demand for training events from Protestant churches across the US and Canada, we talked about exploring ways to reach out to our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers and continuing the legacy of the forum. Board member Jessi-  
ciah Duckworth, who serves as Di-

rector of New Initiatives, will head up a conversation that includes past Forum Team members.

Plan now to attend NAAC's next annual gathering scheduled for Aug. 5-8, 2014 at the Vancouver School of Theology in beautiful British Columbia. Will Willimon of Duke Theological School will be our keynote speaker and for the first time this event will feature a full Catechumenate Team Training Institute.

Blessings in Jesus, whose Pentecost Spirit is with us always,

Rick Rouse, President, on behalf of the NAAC Board of Directors



To the left, Rev. Dr. Ben Stewart, Assistant Professor of Worship at LST Chicago, addresses the joint meeting of NAAC and the Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission in Chicago in July. Top left, Mons Teig and Ruth Myers, at the recent meeting. Above, one of the many gatherings for worship.

## CHRISTIANITY AFTER RELIGION: A BOOK REVIEW . . .

*Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and The Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* by Diana Butler Bass, HarperCollins, 2012.

"...rock 'n' roll is a kind of faith: a ritual and communion that replaces older forms of religion for generations that have grown skeptical of them." Marc Dolan in *Bruce Springsteen and the Promise of Rock and Roll* p. xii

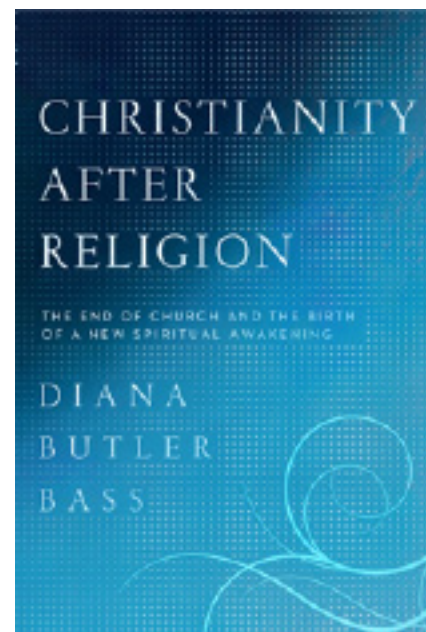
The shift from religion being about attending church to religious behavior being about rock 'n' roll or sports or kid's soccer or reading the Sunday newspaper is what Diana Butler Bass' *Christianity after Religion* is all about. Yes, this is another book about the "emergent church." It is a "sustained refection on how religion has changed in our lifetime" (p. 7\*). The greater part of the book is an analysis of what has already happened in terms of the shift away from traditional religion. It is not until Part III "Awakening" that we get to "what is happening now and what can happen as the awakening moves from vision to practice" (p. 36).

If you have not yet familiarized yourself with "emergent church" theology, this is a good place to start. Butler Bass relies heavily on William McLoughlin's *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* but also finds support for her reflections in numerous polls and surveys by the Pew Research Center and others. Her reflections are in line with other analyses of the decline of church attendance in the past 50 years.

Part III of *Christianity after*

*Religion* is where Butler Bass presents us with a challenge. We are in the Fourth Great Awakening of spiritual renewal. Seekers are moving from being "spiritual but not religious" to discovering what it is to be spiritual and religious. Being spiritual can be an individual quest. As historians of religion (including Butler Bass) know, spiritualities are housed in religions, with all of the latter's gifts and warts. The challenge is to prepare, practice, play and participate in this new Awakening. Those faith communities who take up this challenge can thrive and grow. Those who do not are being left behind and are dying. This is relevant for catechumenal ministry.

Most of us who minister in the catechumenate eventually explore the "inquiry stage." Where do candidates for baptism and related "disciple-making processes" come from? When we step back and reflect on who the inquirers are, many find that they are people who have already joined "the Church." They have responded to God's call by finding and joining our church. Our ministry is to engage in the formation process that makes disciples out of members (see *Go Make Disciples*, Augsburg Fortress, 2012 for a good description of this process). We find candidates through "soft evangelism," i.e., promoting the catechumenate within our faith communities. Consequently, we often have candidates who are more interested in getting answers about the practices and doctrines of the denomination to which they are drawn than in



doing the hard work of *metanoia*. As catechumenal ministers we may turn catechumenate meetings into classes focused on these doctrines and practices.

But where do we find new members? How do we meet those seekers who still live with the presumption that churches are iconic institutions where preachers ask for more money and members gossip about each other?

Butler Bass hints to at least two answers to these questions. We need to continue an "internal ministry" [my term] in which we (our faith communities) practice *metanoia*. We need to form and support evangelizers who go to clubs, meet others at kid's soccer, spend Sundays at coffee houses. And we need to welcome those who come to work the soup kitchen but not "go to church." Sound idealistic? Perhaps. Either way, it means the end of "church" as many know it.

Jerry Paré, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Sacramento

## MAKING DISCIPLES THE WAY JESUS DID

*This paper was presented by John W.B. Hill at a meeting of NAAC and will be continued in subsequent newsletters: "Making Disciples the Way Jesus Did: René Girard and the Future of Baptismal Catechesis."*

What can be learned about the ministry of 'making disciples' from the way Jesus did it? Surprisingly, in all the work that has been done to date in restoring the ministry of catechumenal formation in the church, remarkably little account has been taken of Jesus' way of making disciples.<sup>1</sup>

What follows is an attempt to apply some of the insights of René Girard in reading the Gospels<sup>2</sup> to unlock the question: How did Jesus make disciples, and – more to the point – what is the purpose of discipleship?

The four Gospels are not eye-witness accounts of the matter, nor may they be harmonized to form an aggregate account. Nevertheless, each of them informs the reading of the others; and even in their use of mythological forms of storytelling and culturally adapted detail, they serve as our primary witnesses to the nature of the gospel revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. What follows, then, is an attempt to explore the witness of the Gospels to Jesus' work with his disciples, using Girardian insights.

### **Gospel Portrait of the Disciples**

Jesus gathered disciples from the beginning of his public work; and all four Gospels imply that 'the twelve' played some special role. Although there were apparently many more, yet 'the twelve' were

symbolically essential to work of Jesus. They were 'apostles'<sup>3</sup>; they anticipated the renewal of the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>4</sup> The twelve by their very calling signaled Jesus' conviction that God's original calling of Israel to be his people was still God's unwavering agenda. Israel of old had been constituted to stand in the greatest possible contrast to all other nations – a people formed *from* victims rather than being formed by *eliminating* victims.<sup>5</sup> So, a renewed Israel would once again be grounded in God's unbounded love – the revelation of a different kind of peace and social order than the prevailing peace and order of the Roman Empire, grounded in violence.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the disciples completely failed to understand what Jesus was up to. For example, although Peter is reported to have recognized Jesus as the Messiah, he immediately demonstrated that his concept<sup>7</sup> of what this would mean was completely at odds with Jesus' concept. They all heard Jesus predict his Passion, but they refused to take this seriously and were afraid to ask.<sup>8</sup> They assumed that Jesus was about to launch a new political regime, and argued about which of them would get cabinet positions.<sup>9</sup> When they learned of Jesus' growing anxiety, they all swore they would stand by him<sup>10</sup>; but when he was arrested, they all deserted him and ran away.<sup>11</sup> Are we then to believe that, whatever Jesus was doing to make disciples, it wasn't very effective?

Jesus attempted to show the disciples how to live a life free of



scandal or stumbling Jesus attempted to show the disciples how to live a life free of scandal or stumbling<sup>12</sup>, that is to say, a life without envy or rivalry, a life of gratitude without anxiety because it was the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom; nevertheless his own death proved to be for them the greatest scandal of all, the thing over which they did stumble.

### **The First Thrust in Jesus' Work**

According to the synoptic Gospels, Jesus' preeminent theme in his teaching of the disciples was the dawning of the Kingdom of God, the establishment of God's Culture of Life. And the very possibility of this culture lay in the imaging of God's ways that Jesus himself modeled<sup>13</sup>. He demonstrated a passion to imitate his Father in heaven and do his Father's will. It was a passion grounded in the spiritual consciousness portrayed in the remarkable story of Jesus' baptism ("You are my Son, my beloved; in you I am well pleased"). Even the fourth Gospel, which cunningly skirts the actual event, agrees with the others in making this episode foundational in the ministry of Jesus. Doing the

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will of his Father, desiring only to please the Father, Jesus became the model for the disciples of non-acquisitive imitation.

And so he taught the disciples what a life centred on imitation of God is like. It is a life formed by prayer and immune to scandal. It is a life free to welcome the Kingdom of God. He taught them to recognize the subtle ways in which they could be lured back into the old life of rivalry – through the temptation to retaliate, through love of money, through passing judgement on others. And he also taught them to expect persecution by the Culture of Death.<sup>14</sup>

None of this is exceptional in a biblical context except for the astonishing way Jesus identified the Culture of Death, the alternative to the Kingdom of God. The devil, or Satan, who is rarely mentioned in Hebrew scripture, is suddenly a major player in all four Gospels. Satan is the Accuser, the personification of that social process of justifying ourselves by blaming someone else. Satan is the organizing principle of conventional culture; and Jesus undertook to expose the Reign of Satan, the Culture of Death.

The synoptic Gospels, in telling of the temptations that immediately followed Jesus' baptism, invite us to recognize that this awareness of the Reign of Satan shaped Jesus' consciousness from the beginning of his ministry. When the devil is portrayed as having power over all the kingdoms of the world<sup>15</sup>, we are invited to recognize that this is the power that Jesus would have

to break if the Kingdom of God were to be established.

### **Second Thrust in Jesus' Work**

How could Satan's reign be dismantled? Only by subverting it from within, continuing the strategy already glimpsed in the Hebrew scriptures, the strategy of entering the world of mythology in order to demythologize it.<sup>16</sup> Jesus would become Satan's victim, Satan's scapegoat; Caiaphas spoke for Satan when he said, "It is better that one man die for the nation than that the whole people should perish."<sup>17</sup> But Satan's power would not thereby be solidified one more time because Jesus would expose the mechanism of scapegoating and the innocence of the victim.

This is the basis of the final lesson Jesus gave the disciples, according to the synoptic Gospels. The lesson did not sink in at the time, though it hinted at the purpose of all the rest of their training. On the night he knew he would be betrayed, Jesus carefully arranged a secret rendezvous with them to celebrate the Passover Seder, uninterrupted by Judas' plot. And what he did was to recast the traditional Passover ritual to become a definitive and lasting interpretation of his death. Just as he was soon going to give himself into the hands of his enemies, into the power of Satan, so now he gave himself into the hands of his friends, saying, "This is my body given for you; this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many."

The Passover ritual, of course, included a sacrifice: the lamb was a substitute for the ancient

sacrifice of the first-born.<sup>18</sup> But Jesus was going to expose the primal sin of founding a society on sacred violence; for the life of God's people can only be grounded in the unbounded love of the Creator. Nevertheless, this people was about to try, once again, to reconstitute itself through violence: the murder of Jesus himself. What was to be done? He would freely give himself into their clutches as an act unbounded love, providing a new grounding for their new existence and liberating them from the old existence founded in victimization.

At table, then, he substituted a human sacrifice – himself – for the animal sacrifice – the lamb. Except that this time it would not be a sacrifice in the old sense; rather, it would be the end of sacrifice in that sense, for it would not be another triumph of victimization but the undoing of victimization by the divine generosity of self-offering love.<sup>19</sup>

Even if his disciples could not take it in at that moment, the memorial meal would become for them and for all later disciples a potential revelation of the way Jesus had unraveled the sacrificial mechanism.

Another astonishing note in the synoptic gospels is the prominence of demon-possession – something else we never heard about before in the Bible. Today we tend to down-play this, suggesting that ancient people didn't have the medical categories available to us, so they resorted to the mythical diagnosis of demon possession to account

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for things like mental illness or personality disorder. That may be true; but that also misses the point. When someone has a condition we find disturbing, we try to avoid that person; and when everyone avoids you, you are being locked out, excluded. We maintain our 'sanity' by projecting our fears on you, calling you 'insane' and forcing you to live on the streets. We demonize you. We cast you out. And you are truly demonized when you start to believe it yourself, when your sense of yourself is displaced by the 'demon' that we have projected onto you. But Jesus reached out to such people and drew them back in. And, according to the synoptics, when Jesus sent the apostles on their mission to the towns and villages of Galilee, their commission included a ministry of exorcism.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Although Paul in his letters referred to his Christian friends as 'the saints', or 'the church(es) of God', the Acts of Apostles implies that individually the followers of Jesus thought of themselves as 'disciples' (cf 11: 26). The importance of the disciples in the four Gospels, then, is not to serve as a foil for Jesus, but as prototypes of what subsequent followers of Jesus would be and become. This assumption about the significance of the first disciples lies behind the mandate of the risen Christ in Matthew 28: 18 - 20.

<sup>2</sup>The Gospel insights of René Girard are spelled out in his many writings, such as: *Violence and*

*the Sacred* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1977); *The Scapegoat* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986); *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1987); *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Novalis, Toronto, 2001).

<sup>3</sup>Mark 3: 14      <sup>4</sup>Matthew 19: 28

<sup>5</sup>A fundamental claim of Girard is that victimization – scapegoating – is the foundation of archaic (and most subsequent) social order. <sup>6</sup>Girard proposes that the conflict arising from competing desires which could have prevented the very emergence of stable human society has invariably been overcome by diverting the violence of all-against-all into a violence of all-against-one. Such scapegoating has such a remarkable power to create social unanimity that people consider it a sacred phenomenon; thus is born the category of 'the sacred', providing the very foundation of all human social order (the cult at the root of culture).

<sup>7</sup>Mark 8: 32      <sup>8</sup>Mark 9: 32

<sup>9</sup>Mark 10: 35 - 45

<sup>10</sup>Mark 14: 18 - 19, 27 - 31

<sup>11</sup>Mark 14: 46 - 50

<sup>12</sup>In Girard's reading of the Gospels, 'scandal' refers to the way rivals become stumbling-blocks to one another, each constituting the obstacle to the other's acquisition of the object they both desire. 'Scandal' is the envy, rivalry, jealousy and resentment that lead to escalating conflict and violence.

<sup>13</sup>In Girard's anthropology, our every desire – except for natural appetites which we sometimes confuse with 'desires' – arises through 'mimesis': my desire is an imitation of the desire of someone else who has become my model. Jesus teaches that our true model (who does not incite rivalry) is 'your Father in heaven': "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6: 36).

<sup>14</sup>Matt. 5 - 7

<sup>15</sup>Matt. 4: 8 - 10; Luke 4: 5 - 8

<sup>16</sup>Girard observes that the stories of the Hebrew scriptures, even when they most closely resemble the world's classical mythology, subvert that mythology by exposing the one thing that mythology always conceals: the villains of mythology are not actually responsible for the crises which their deaths or expulsions resolve. The story of Cain and Abel, for example, strikingly resembles the story of Romulus and Remus (each is a story about the founding of a great city); yet the story of Romulus and Remus is told to explain why Romulus was right to kill his brother, whereas the biblical story is about the innocence of Abel.

<sup>17</sup>John 11: 49 - 52

<sup>18</sup>According to Girard, social order is founded upon sacred violence, and ritual sacrifice has its origins in the need to revisit that violence to sustain the social order.

<sup>19</sup>Matt. 14 - 29; Mark 14: 10 - 25; Luke 22: 3 - 22; 1 Cor. 11: 23 - 27

*(To be continued)*

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