

# **BOTHERED & BEWILDERED**

Enacting Hope in Troubled Times

**ANN MORISY**



## Bothered and Bewildered

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This book is dedicated to Candy Torres,  
a pioneer of enacted hope in difficult times



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# Treatise

We are living in troubled times and people have become bothered and bewildered.

When people are bothered and bewildered, great caution is needed because our instinctive response is scapegoating and death-dealing.

Christian teaching and practice need to take account of this potential for scapegoating and death-dealing and are especially relevant here because Jesus brings an end to the need for a scapegoat.

The unique capacity of Christianity to help people rise above death-dealing inclinations makes it urgent that we share our faith, but this mission imperative must be combined with pastoral care.

It's imperative that we don't lose sight of hope, but simply to declaim or assert hope isn't enough: we have to *enact* it. Enacted hope consists of tiny micro actions and graced actions that point to the reality of God's design for his creation.

In a time when we are bothered and bewildered, a vital resource is the capacity for reflectiveness on the part of those both inside the Church and outside it.

The J-Curve graph alerts us to the danger that, when things are bad, there is a risk of taking shortcuts to avoid the challenge of changing our ways.

One reason we are so bothered and bewildered is because we have invested so much in the economy of scarcity that we find it hard to believe that there is also an economy of abundance.

In his actions and teaching, Jesus shows us how we can participate in this economy of abundance.

Others are also discovering the viability of the economy of abundance, in particular those concerned with positive psychology, which endorses long-established faith practices and the health-giving aspects of having a faith.

Positive psychology underlines that our capacity for wellbeing is not just to do with our genes and circumstances, but that there is vast scope for *intentional activities*, even when confronted by the direst circumstances.

Faith practices have an exceptional track record of helping people – especially those in dire circumstances (including addictions) – to rise above those circumstances and engage in life-enhancing *intentional activity*.

In the economy of abundance intentional activities which express generosity and compassion generate a cascade of positive outcomes.

The ability to make sense of our actions within a larger frame gives vital motivation to embrace the intentional activity that enables us to resist being *victims* of troublesome circumstances.

This relevance and transformational power of our Christian faith, especially in troubled times, make it urgent to build a church which enables people to engage with the coaching that Jesus gives in how to live, rather than emphasising ‘hard-to-believe’ formulaic faith.

# I Dystopia ... the End of a Hope-filled Future

*As I walk past the lines of horse chestnut trees I see the leaves have turned brown, and many that have fallen weeks and weeks ahead of autumn. I notice how the bark has split on many of the trees and a sticky sap exudes. Yes, these trees like so many horse chestnuts are infested by tiny leaf boring moths and also affected by bleeding canker ... I wonder whether the local authority knows about the problems? And then I speculate that the parks department won't be in a position to tackle such a large scale problem in a way that sustains rather than demolishes. In my dystopian mood I foresee the chainsaw working overtime as one after another the trees are brought down because of health and safety concerns that large branches may fall. The splendid avenue of trees that had given pleasure over the century will disappear and be impossible to replace ... And then the question as to why these magnificent trees have succumbed now to these tiny moths and canker, and my thoughts turn to London pollution and global warming. This dismal spiral is made real each day as I mundanely walk the dog.<sup>1</sup>*

I grew up with the expression 'As old as a conker tree'. Conker, or should I say horse chestnut trees, can be two hundred years old and they are tall and statuesque, they are likely to be the biggest and strongest trees in our parklands. That's how it is on Streatham Common. Each morning I walk the dog on the Common, and walk

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1 The current assessment as to what is happening to horse chestnut trees is that they are infected by *Ohrdella*: 'in only four years clouds of this rare little insect have romped through most of England'. The bleeding canker is an airborne infection and is deadly on trees up to the age of about twenty-five. 'It is a valid reason for felling a chestnut, whereas the insect-attackers are not,' Robin Lane Fox, 'Troubled Trees', *Financial Times*, 4/5 October 2008.