



# Of Babies and Bathwater

## *Preaching Post-Theism*

written and published by David Simmers

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**Recent books such as Bishop John Shelby Spong's *Jesus for the Non-Religious*, which aims to 'recover the divine at the heart of the human', do an excellent task of deconstructing Christianity in light of a contemporary world view and of religious and Biblical scholarship of the past century and a half.**

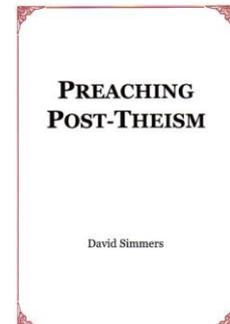
But there is little discussion of the shape that a Christian life might take – if it is to be maintained within the church – as a consequence of adopting such a non-theistic approach. Whether such a new form is even possible is still open for speculation, and only time will tell if the Christian church – or perhaps a part of it – may eventually reform itself to embrace a non-theistic view of the teachings of Jesus and the wisdom of the Bible.

David Simmers' *Preaching Post-Theism* suggests what some aspects of such a reformed christian life might be. (He always uses a small 'c'.) David does not specifically define the term 'post-theism', but he makes several indicative comments: the "approach of a number of contemporary theologians", "these 'radical' ideas", "the new, more 'secular' approach". Nor does David state why he prefers to prefix 'theism' with 'post-' rather than the more usual 'non', but my reading of his book would suggest that it is because he does not want to throw God out, as it were, with the bath water, but rather to work from the human end and to determine what can be found out about God, the divine and the purposes and meanings of our lives when approaching from that direction.

David is a New Zealander who was a Rhodes Scholar and then a Presbyterian minister, but when he grappled with the ideas of Lloyd Geering and Don Cupitt he realised that if he took these ideas seriously, he would have to completely revise his approach to christianity. However, he – like so many others – had little idea of how to do this. Out of conscience, David resigned from his parish and took a secular job, but over the years he continued to preach occasionally, and each chapter of *Preaching Post-Theism* is a sermon from these later years.

As a non-church attender I do not make a habit of listening to or reading sermons, but I found David's short, thoughtful homilies, which are written in a most accessible style, both uplifting and thought-provoking.

David is a thinking and compassionate man who struggles both mentally and practically to find a way in which to daily live his life in light of the precepts of Jesus. His book is a meditation on and a reflection of his beliefs and faith. Rather than preaching an official line, he is open about his struggles with his faith as a christian. He does not try to resolve every inconsistency, and accepts that some things in the gospels and christian tradition are just plain wrong. And here I found David's references to books that have influenced him particularly helpful. David looks for the essential messages that are able to act as pointers as to how one might live daily as a christian in the contemporary world and create meaning and purpose in one's life while doing so.



*Shirley Dixon, Titahi Bay*

## **Some excerpts:**

"Most sermons start with the Bible text and then move on to its relevance for us today – starting from the top as it were, from the revelation of God in the Bible, and working down to our experience here and now. But it is also possible to work the other way, from the bottom up, starting with everyday experience, and pondering it until it reveals something of its inner meaning, something about God."

"And then there is love, the greatest of the three. It is the option our faith decides for, the good our hope strives for. Such a little word, such a hackneyed word – but so inexhaustible in the possible ways it may be expressed."

"I still felt (and feel) that christian faith can be expressed in a way that takes account of the new age in which we live; but it is a very difficult and challenging task, especially if you want to do it within the ordinary life of an ordinary congregation and take people with you rather than create havoc."