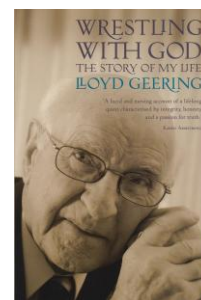


Wrestling With God

Wrestling With God, The Story of My Life,

By Lloyd Geering

Bridget Williams Books in association with Craig Potton Publishing.



Those of us who have lived through and have been associated with many of the events and personalities covered by Lloyd Geering in his autobiography turned the pages with anticipation and with pleasure. Those with a fleeting or casual interest in religious affairs will also find it a lively, even gripping, read. Lloyd Geering writes in clear and concise prose and it flows. The content is part personal and part theological, lightened with touches of humour and sharpened with conflict. Although it took place nearly forty years ago, the 1967 heresy trial is still a defining moment in New Zealand public life. But this autobiography is above all the story of one man's wrestling with the big deep questions of life, especially when viewed through a Christian lens. This struggle has involved a lifetime of hard thinking, reading, lecturing, writing and broadcasting which has influenced many lives and which (I will claim) is on the brink of bringing to birth a new religious species, post-Christian man.

Those who have seen the excellent Swedish movie "As It Is In Heaven" will have caught glimpses of post-Christian man portrayed in the attitudes and actions of members of the local church choir. Under the tutelage of a famous young and handsome conductor the choir develops not only musically but in ordinary human ways. Its members become more at ease with one another, more honest and open but not without episodes of emotional and physical conflict. An obese man taunted and pilloried all his life sees the wrong righted; an intellectually handicapped boy is welcomed into the choir and cared for when he soils his pants; a young abused wife is given refuge; sexual feelings are expressed but not flaunted. The musical repertoire of the choir is expanded to include secular as well as sacred pieces, performances are held in the village hall as well as in the church, the choir have fun and games and parties and when the conductor falls ill at a national competition in Austria the members take over - and apparently win! All this happens during a crisis with the very conservative and authoritarian village pastor who is jealous of the young conductor, especially because of his appeal to the women members of the choir. The pastor rails against sin until his wife — also in the choir — can take it no more. In one explosive scene she shrieks at her husband, "Sin, sin, there is no sin. It's all in your head, all in your mind."

The movie highlights the contrast between the more conservative and traditional Christian era passing away and the post-Christian era now emerging; it was as though Lloyd Geering had written the script in his autobiography. The choir members found, under the guidance of their young creative conductor, a wide range of possibilities opening up before them. These were not imposed by any external authority but welled up from within. And they became a new people.

Post-christians, I am suggesting, are of the same ilk as the members of the church choir. Post-christians, if they choose to use the term God at all, will be aware of a Voice, a Presence, a nudge or niggle or prompting from within, "Someone" of "Something" calling them to realize the highest moral and spiritual values one can live by. Often this Voice is deafeningly silent, cruelly absent — or seems so. Postchristians will see Jesus as a sage or visionary who saw further than other mortals and who is altogether human though not divine. Some may experience Jesus in a transcendent though not other-worldly, way.

Post-christians will be citizens of the secular world which is the only world we have and know. Their mission will be to add as much value as they can to this world which they share with other races and peoples. They will be constantly aware of the wonder and mystery of life which they may choose to call "God".

Post-christians will not "go to church" but will be participating members of a small group or fellowship of their choice which may or may not be specifically religious. These groups will have a "liturgy", a work to do, whose function will be to add value to life.

Post-christians will be more amorphous than their forbears, they will not necessarily have a specific "Christian" identity but will be open to the gifts and insights of other world-views, religious, scientific, philosophical, political and so on.

This, (to quote from a previous title of a Lloyd Geering book) is the shape of *The World to Come*. It is indeed already emerging, it is (to quote another Geering book) *Resurrection, A Symbol of Hope*.

Alan M Goss, Napier