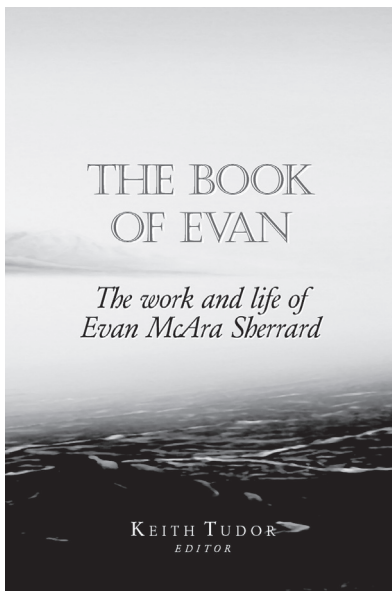


Book Review

The Book of Evan: The Work and Life of Evan McAra Sherrard.
Edited by Keith Tudor. (2017). Waimauku, Aotearoa New Zealand: Resource Books.
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God is Dead: Long Live God

The book's title is apt. Apart from a minor ecclesiastical "in-joke" deploying the preposition "of" it has connotations linking part with whole, which is what the book attends to diligently. The editor is to be congratulated not only for his demonstrated capability in shaping the text towards a common signature but also for curating available material presented in a range of textual formats and peppered with photographs. There is a broad range of contributors too, including family members, friends, professional colleagues.

My advice to any reader is to skim through the Introduction, grasp basic time-lines and then commence reading from the back, adopting a Hebrew/Japanese/Arabic approach. Why? Because in the end is the beginning. Kick-off with Evan's Credo. And a second reason, while it may be possible

to bookend a person's life with metaphors such as "Life's journey" or "Chapters" these merely reify a particular interpretation of "time" as a benchmark, and in doing so miss the point entirely. Time is not linear, it's warped through space. Far better to utilise a metaphor every Kiwi has experienced: volcanic disturbances. This metaphor slides into literalness when multiple fault-lines emerge unexpectedly to become grist for lived experiences. Want an example? We have a case in point, *The Book of Evan*. An implicit timeless theme running throughout this book is of an explorer's joint adventure, seeking yet never accepting "yes" for an answer, of welcoming doubt as much as being frustrated by it in an ever-changing world.

I say "joint-adventure" because, in this context another preposition for the book's title, "about" is not appropriate. That hints more at a revelatory discourse and there is very little

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about Evan's dynamic make-up, what made him tick is not presented here. Yet, there is much about what he accomplished through various theoretically inspired practises to understand how others ticked and how he pushed their buttons, along with patience and skill encouraging them to other, healthier niches. I was drawn to the few occasions when readers could peer under the developmental mantle; his mother's lack of affection, his abandonment as a youngster in hospital and its concomitant aftermath as a Chaplain and, finally, his discovery of legitimating authentic affect in his third decade (aided and abetted by Isabelle's warm hands I'd suggest). I'd venture to say this discovery was a major fault-line motivating his re-calling, pivoting around his (unmentioned) "hippy phase, replete with kaftan", of breaking free. Evan was a passionate devotee of SciFi and was familiar with Herbert's Dune series no less than Star Trek and Dr Who, all of which he once told me, provided windows to understand different cultural designs; quite appropriate given his own ecdysis.

How he handled successive transitions re-organising his professional commitments offers us a glimpse into the prevailing psycho-therapeutic Zeitgeist. Readers are encouraged to recognise these multiple awakenings and how they moulded Evan's ongoing professional engagements. From what I can fathom, it all started with his realisation of education's potential in clinical and pastoral contexts (representing a shift from educare, to train, towards educere meaning draw out). Education was the bridge which led to further training and implementation of health and developmental enhancing policies in different institutions.

Evan was the embodiment of an oxymoron where unusual juxtapositions were accepted seamlessly without creating unnecessary tensions often plaguing others. From his agricultural heritage, an oxymoron arises every time a growing plant's natural holistic confluence of stems, leaves and flowers is observed. From his religious calling, there's inspiration available from a great oxymoron, the unity of a trinity. This book contains many illustrative examples, not in the usual dualistic sense of separateness but of graced interdependence. Here are some of the opposing forces gleaned from the text: secular-Christian, private-public, TA-psychodrama, doubt-acceptance, challenge-peace, distant-close, integrated-disparate, discord-harmony, quiet-outspoken, solitary-engaged, academic-practical, calm-stormy, I-Thou, gentle-blunt, cocky-façade, body-spirit, pushy-supportive, abrasive-soothing, incisive-gentle, fight-discovery, parent-adult-child, mystery-rationality, acceptance-denial, mystic-realist, blunt-loving, playful-serious. His Credo radiates exactly this sense of a massive theological oxymoron resolved peacefully. It's no wonder others report a broad spectrum of Evan's sense of connectedness of thought and deed wrapped in mystery, just as he does himself

If I was to say one thing to Evan now it would be, "About bloody time, mate". Much of what is published here for the first time should have seen the light of day decades ago. For instance, the gritty, well-reasoned paper, "TA and psychodrama: An exploration of the concepts of ego states and role" (1985) could have benefitted from commentaries and become a land-mark article in the discipline's NZ annals. But then again, as others note in this book, that was characteristic of Evan's style: gentle, persuasive, challenging but reserved when it came to publishing. Now I challenge you teachers, there are no further excuses: get this material into the hands of students and invite them to prepare and defend their own critiques.

Social constructivism is a respectable academic methodology and permeates many disciplines. It has challenged and pervaded the sacrosanct shibboleths of Presbyterianism too, spearheaded by Geering's brave thesis. Even though not acknowledging it specifically, Evan was a student of this methodology too and, as usual, contemporary. Indeed, his *Credo* epitomises social constructionism and this led to my caption for this review.

Apart from his well-designed sermons, his public rebuke of professionally unacceptable behaviour, his plethora of previously unpublished articles and sermons, this book carries heart-felt commentaries by family and other well-wishers. One in particular I found was cast much as a short-story and its ending left me breathless, a gasp of astonishment for a brilliant, poignant termination. I wish I could write like that, beautifully poetic and hand-crafted by Reverend Roger Hey:

One final memory of this man who has enriched my life professionally and personally so much was a winter's night when we both departed from a discussion group at St Luke's Presbyterian Church. By this time I knew he was seriously unwell. Evan was walking to Isabelle, who was waiting for him in their car. I watched his departing outline retreat as the dark night slowly swallowed him up. Then, he was gone. (pp.169-170)

References

Sherrard, E. (1985). TA and psychodrama: An exploration of the concept of ego states and role. Fifth Annual TA Conference of Australia and New Zealand, Christchurch. Reprinted in K. Tudor (Ed.), *The book of Evan: The work and life of Evan McAra Sherrard* (pp. 241-250). Auckland, New Zealand: Resource Books.



John Kirkland is the unnamed challenging Massey University friend mentioned on page 349 of *The Book of Evan*, who has enjoyed the Sherrard family's company for over half a century and was fortunate enough to have heard many of Evan's First Church sermons as an undergraduate in the mid-60's. Now semi-retired, John enjoys spotting unintentional humour, pottering around assisting with maintenance of a large mature planter's garden in Kimbolton and retains a research profile currently aiming at identifying characteristics of young adults' explorer-potential. He is married to Barbara Maclean, parent of twins Patricia and Donald, step-parent to Karyn, Stephen, Paul, and Shelley, welcomes and enjoys grandparenting opportunities. Contact details: johnkirkland@gmail.com .