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It is not often that one can say that a theological biography is just waiting to be made into a movie – but I think this is it.

The biography of Athol Gill is a thought-provoking account of a one of the more controversial Australian theologians in recent decades. Athol Gill was a Baptist theologian and educator in both Queensland and Victoria, although perhaps is best known for his leadership in the radical discipleship movement – the book title in fact comes from the name of the Melbourne community which Gill founded.

Perhaps the aspect of the life of Gill which comes through most clearly was his absolute courage in confronting his opponents, especially those of the fundamentalist persuasion. Athol Gill was sacked twice by church authorities, in Queensland in 1972 and in Victoria in 1984, although on the second occasion the decision was reversed, in quite dramatic circumstances.

The account of what effectively amounted to a public inquisition of Gill in September 1984 makes compelling reading. It is doubly compelling to see how, through this inquisition process, Gill confounded his opponents, and the Victorian Baptists subsequently voted 90% to overturn the earlier sacking decision.

On a personal level, the author identifies the importance of Gill's country upbringing in the NSW town of Wauchope as a key to his understanding his character and his identification with the outsider - Athol Gill in his formative years had been very much an outsider.

One of my historical concerns with *A Gentle Bunyip* is that the author doesn't seem really aware of the role of the Sydney-based House of the New World within the radical discipleship movement. The fact that the Brisbane-based and Melbourne-based communities held similar names to the earlier Sydney community is in itself a clue to the central role of the Sydney house-community.

A Gentle Bunyip also raises many serious theological questions. To what extent was/is the radical discipleship movement really all about middle-class young people wanting to appropriate radical chic? What does it actually mean to identify with the poor and oppressed? Indeed what does it mean to live an ethical lifestyle today?

Perhaps the most profound question is raised by Harold Pidwell's conclusion, when he writes that Athol Gill's quest to reform the church was a failure. Ought we then say that the commitment of so many people to the radical discipleship movement was therefore misguided? Ultimately I think not – but the question still needs to be asked.

Overall *A Gentle Bunyip* is a fascinating book. The author is not entirely uncritical of Athol Gill, showing him at times to be quite domineering. Nevertheless it is difficult for the reader not to be impressed by the enormous courage and integrity of the man.

Those who have been influenced by Athol Gill, those who are interested in human conflict, and those who are interested in exploring the complexities of how one might live out an ethical lifestyle today, all will be interested in reading *A Gentle Bunyip*.

Pidwell, Harold. 2007. *A Gentle Bunyip: The Athol Gill Story*. West Lakes: Seaview Press.