

ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Religious Freedom

Can we
still
protect
them?

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Liberal Theology
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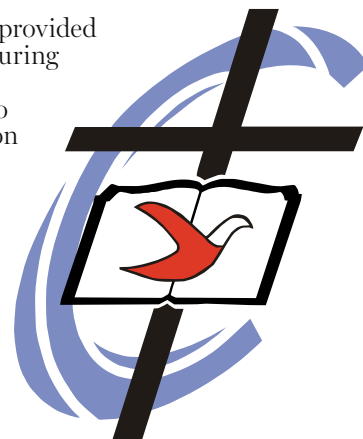


Cover photo - Supplied

EDITORIAL

Thank you to all the members who have provided words of encouragement and support during these difficult months and prayed for members of presbyteries who made a stand to call the Assembly to account for its decision on marriage. Joining together and supporting each other has strengthened many groups in regions throughout Australia and created new fellowships and movements. May you continue to meet together and support each other in prayer and fellowship during this unpredictable time in the life of the church. Please consider joining in the ACC prayer times on Wednesday morning and Sunday afternoon either by Zoom or with other members in your local area. (Details available from the office).

Peace and grace,
Peter Bentley



ACCatalyst is published by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc.
ABN 73 794 518 715 ARBN 128 001 785.
Incorporated in NSW. INC 9887628.
Liability of members is limited. Opinions expressed in ACCatalyst do not necessarily reflect the official views of the assembly.
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ACCatalyst is a member of The Australian Religious Press Association
Design & Layout: Wes Selwood (Selwood Media)
Printed by Brougham Press, Scoresby Rd, Bayswater Vic. ISSN 1835 2073



The Parnaroo Road

by Robyn Painter

Robyn Painter ministers in the Peterborough community



No matter how hard someone tried, I don't think they could drive up the Parnaroo road without leaving a trail.

The dust on the road is so thick in parts you feel like you're swimming through it, and after you've passed it seems to hang in the air for miles behind. So whether you like it or not, you leave a trail, and anyone who happens to be around can see that you've been down that road. It's just like the snails in my garden, that

leave a silver trail of slime behind them, or how when we were young, Easter Bunny would leave a trail of eggs through Wirrabara forest.

I guess most people prefer to drive on the bitumen - no one can see where you started from, or where you went after that, and, of course, your car stays much cleaner.

But life is more like the Parnaroo road than the Barrier Highway. How we live our lives and what kind of person we are is visible to others, and we will leave a trail. It's up to us what sort of trail we leave. If we live selfishly with little regard for others, we will leave a trail of hurt and anger.

If we forget about ourselves and seek to do good to others, we will leave a trail of blessing.

Sometimes it's easy to be grumpy. It's easy to brush people aside or look down on them.

But the Bible asks us to make the choice not to be like that.

Paul says in Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity,

let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

And in Philippians 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Galatians 6:9 says Let us not become weary in doing good.

After all, we are followers of Jesus, who in an act of utter selflessness and concern for others, gave his life to save all of us from our sins and give us eternal life with him. That was the trail Jesus left. We can show love to others, because he has shown love to us. We can be generous, because he is generous with us. And we can make sacrifices for others, because of that great and matchless sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross.

News from GAFCON

ACC is honoured to reprint Dr Peter Jensen's concluding letter following his term as General Secretary of GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference)

And so ... On January 1st Archbishop Ben Kwashi became General Secretary of Gafcon in succession to me.

I cannot say how pleased I am to welcome him into this role. I admire him very much as a wise man of God, and think that his passion for prayer and the sharing of God's word will be an immense encouragement to the Gafcon movement as we seek to, 'proclaim Christ faithfully to the nations.' God has also endowed our brother with spiritual perceptiveness and courage – gifts he will certainly need.

When I think of the message of Jerusalem 2018, 'Proclaim Christ Faithfully to the Nations', I am always so glad that the word 'faithfully' appears. All our churches have many failings and even scandals. We are very far from perfect. But the aim of proclaiming Christ faithfully gives us a purpose, a goal, and a character.

Why?

Well, even in the New Testament times, we hear that there were those who came proclaiming 'another Jesus than the one we proclaimed to you' and hence a different Spirit and a different Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4). Merely using the name 'Jesus' does not mean that you are talking about the real Jesus and the Gospel in all its truth and glory. We all need to have our Gospel shaped by the Biblical witness itself.

Of course we are helped to do this by the wisdom of those who study the text and the wisdom of those who have gone before us. But the only infallible guide to the truth about Jesus is the Scripture, the word of the living God.

Much is at stake. It is the testimony of Scripture that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23) and that 'the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). Every single human being is so important in the eyes of God, that we will be held accountable for our sins of thought, word and deed on the Day of Judgement and the proper punishment for our sins is the place of destruction, hell itself.

The Gospel is not some children's game, or some therapy to make us feel better. It is deadly serious. And it needs to be preached faithfully, in its full-orbed truth. It is about the salvation of sinners from hell.

'The wages of sin is death', but the rest of this wonderful sentence runs, 'the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'. These words capture the grace of God (the free gift) given to us when we did not deserve it and were incapable of being good enough to receive it. It reminds us of the glory that is ours in eternal life, as opposed to destruction. And it tells us where eternal life may be found, namely in the Jesus who is the Christ, the fulfilment of all the promises of God, and the one who saves us by being our Lord.

In our times, the tendency is to omit two absolutely vital parts of this: First, the fact that we are faced with the choice between life and death. We fail to preach judgement, because we do not want to offend. Instead we preach a Christ who will fulfil all our desires – for money, for success, for happiness, because we cannot believe in eternal life and eternal death.

Second, we omit the summons to repentance which is integral to the true Gospel. For there is no salvation unless we turn away from ourselves and entrust ourselves to Christ as Lord. Our aim as Christians is to please him in all things, because we have received forgiveness through his death on the cross for us and we are now in his kingdom.

Once again, the tendency of our times is to preach Christ without repentance, and that is no gospel at all.

Gafcon started over a dispute about the true Christ. If you accept the idea that sexual sin is not really sinful and that we need to encourage people not to live in accordance with the Bible, we are not proclaiming Christ faithfully, but commending 'another Christ, another Lord'. If you will not preach Christ faithfully, you will not be saving sinners from hell, no matter how big your church or vigorous its programs.

How wonderful it is to be part of a movement amongst Anglicans to proclaim Christ faithfully to the



Dr Peter Jensen

nations. For the peoples of the world need to hear this message above all. And Gafcon is becoming under God a great instrument of authentic gospel preaching to the nations.

It has been such an honour to be part of it!

Let me end on a note of personal testimony. I have been following the Lord personally for 60 years, since I gave my life to Jesus in 1959 as a 15 year old. Many are the testimonies I could give to the grace and mercy of God over those years. But I think it is true to say that I have never seen such answers to prayer or experienced such extraordinary provision from the Lord as in my connection with the Gafcon movement. In particular, a whole array of gifted and committed people seemed to materialise exactly when they were needed to carry on such work as organising the three great Conferences. But there is so much else as well.

I thank all who have helped me and helped the movement. But above all I thank the God of grace, 'For from him and through him and to him are all things. To God be the glory forever. Amen'.

Dr Peter Jensen served as principal of Moore College and Anglican Archbishop of Sydney. He has now stepped down as General Secretary of GAFCON after having served in that role for ten years. He continues to be active in preaching, lecturing and writing.

Dr Jensen's concluding General Secretary blog was published on the GAFCON website: gafcon.org





Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc.

Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia
Confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, Proclaiming the truth, Renewing the church

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Incorporated in NSW INC9887628 | Liability of members is limited

A Pastoral Letter from the National Council of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations

24 January 2019

Dear ACC Member Congregations, Groups and Clusters

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

We, the ACC National Council outline the following points in this letter:

1. the situation that we now find ourselves in post-UCA Assembly 2018;
2. offer a word of encouragement to all our members and congregations to 'stand firm' under the doctrinal and spiritual oversight of the ACC;
3. the proposed program that we will seek to implement and develop over the next three years.
4. the offer by ACC of itself as a 'replacement Assembly in matters vital to the life of your congregation'.

Context post-UCA Assembly 2018 and in the light of the failure of the church to evoke clause 39 b(i).

Sadly, the Presbytery of SA voted not to invoke clause 39 b (i) of the constitution in its January 5th 2019 meeting, which would have suspended the UCA 15th Assembly's decision on same-gender marriage until further consultation. The situation before us then is that:

- the decision of the 15th Assembly (Resolution 64) in July 2018 to vary our policy on marriage to include same gender marriage stands, and;
- 'diversity' is now formally instituted as the new 'ruling authority' within the Uniting Church.

By adopting so called 'same-gender marriage' the Assembly has contradicted the clear witness of Scripture and the Basis of Union which commits us to living and working within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The UCA Assembly has therefore approved practices that go against the natural and biological design of our bodies, which are 'the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you' (1 Cor. 6: 9).

The Assembly has formalised a 'diversity of religious beliefs and ethical understandings' (R64), as the new 'ruling authority' within the Uniting Church and will therefore become instituted and enshrined into every aspect of the life of the church. Those who will be unjustly judged as unwilling to live and work within this new diversity will (as is already happening), be threatened with discipline and discriminated against in terms of candidature processes for ministry, placements and presbytery support etc.

By accepting R64 the Assembly has fallen prey to the lure of the alien gospel of postmodernism where absolute truth as revealed in Scripture now gives way to 'diversity'.

Contrary to the stated aim of creating 'unity in diversity,' decision R64 is causing disunity between ministers and within Councils of the Church. Questions that are unclear include: who will decide whether a minister will be supported in placement if councils disagree with him/her? In the present climate, it is unlikely that ACC ministers and/or members will be treated with the same respect given to supporters of Assembly decision R64.

Standing firm under the doctrinal and spiritual oversight of the ACC

We understand the difficult decision that members and congregations have had to make in terms of leaving the Uniting Church. Paul is right when he said that 'when one part of the body suffers, every part of the body suffers with it' (1 Cor. 12:26).

It grieves us that Uniting Church leaders simply do not care when our members leave. In the President's recent pastoral letter, she has written us and our situation out of the picture as though we do not exist in the Uniting Church that she describes. The President has failed to truly listen and so understand why it is that we cannot live and work within this new diversity framework instituted by R64. It is not that we are 'unwilling' but that Scripture and the Basis of Union do not allow us. Her 'pastoral care' is thus quite unhelpful to us.

In this context, it is understandable why we would no-longer wish to remain 'within' the UCA. However, I encourage all our members to 'stand firm' under the doctrinal and spiritual oversight of the 'Assembly' of Confessing Congregations as we continue to:

- a. build our local congregations, state and regional networks, and our national and international ecumenical relationships;
- b. protest R64 of the 15th Assembly and the state of contradiction and confusion that it has placed

upon the whole church. We must move forward in a way that allows us to maintain our confession within the 'one integrity' framework the Basis of Union so that we are not consumed and forced into the 'two integrities' illusion of the UCA Assembly.

As the UCA Assembly decision R64 on same-gender marriage stands, so do our resolutions that were passed by our ACC AGM in September 2018. They are included again at the end of this letter.

Proposed program for the ACC for the next 3 years 2019-2021

Below are some practical steps that the National Council will seek to implement over the next three years:

In terms of immediate focus, National Council will seek:

- To encourage all ACC congregations to formally adopt the ACC's 'Statement on Marriage'¹ as well as the 'ACC Declaration on Marriage and the Family'². This is to make clear not only our position on marriage, but to particularly highlight that marriage is a matter that 'enters into the substance of the faith' and why we therefore cannot live within the illusion of the two integrities model.
- To encourage all congregations to add the ACC sign and logo to their church building, as well as adding them to their church website and newsletter. This is to clearly and publicly set ourselves apart from the direction the UCA Assembly is leading the church.
- To encourage all congregations to advise the UCA Assembly, Synod and Presbytery of their decision.

As we require extra resources to implement our work, we seek:

- To encourage member Congregations to increase their contributions to the ACC, and/or re-direct a percentage of their giving from wider UCA to the ACC to enable the ACC to increase its capacity to fulfil its goals during this critical period in the history of the church.
- To establish a 'legal reference committee' as well as a 'Legal Fund' to enable the ACC to provide legal support for ministers and local congregations, because of the increasing complex situation we find ourselves in. This will require substantial funds to carry out our required legal tasks effectively.

Our work within State Networks is critical. The National Council will therefore aim:

- to renew our State Networks by appointing State Convenors or field officers where possible so that we can network our congregations more closely and thus better able to provide pastoral care, encouragement and support for one another.
- to make all our congregations in each state visible on the website.
- to hold at least two annual ACC State Network meetings in each state, where the second meeting can be held as part of the ACC Conference as in previous years.

The ACC School of Faith will additionally focus on:

- providing resources for Congregations and individuals to read Scripture, to pray and to fast regularly. Focus must return to the authority of Scripture, and not the 'interpretation' of the scholar.
- holding at least one teaching and training event each year and in each state where possible with a focus on (a) The Basis of Union, and (b) Leadership and training for ministers, leaders and congregations regarding how to engage the church in this state of contradiction that we find ourselves in.
- lay preaching courses and providing support and mentoring for members studying at reformed and evangelical colleges (and a recommended list of colleges).
- A website providing a variety of Christian educational resources including an introductory course on The Basis of Union.

As teaching, training and equipping a generation of younger leaders is essential, particularly with the ability to lead in the modern context we find ourselves in, the NC will appoint three people to help intentionally focus on this task.

- A meeting with our ACC young adults and leaders in Sydney is being arranged in the first quarter of this year (more information to come)
- The young adults group will look at the possibility of restarting the Emerging Leaders Camp or beginning a one day national youth event each or every two years. To begin in 2020.

In terms of our Ecumenical relationships, the National Council will

- write to all our ecumenical partners inviting them to relate to the 'Assembly of Confessing Congregations' as embodying the apostolic and catholic faith expressed in the Basis of Union of the UCA.
- Visit National Conferences where possible and home churches to directly discuss the above.
- To formally invite the Korean Presbytery to become members of the ACC.

The date, location and theme for our 2019 ACC Conference and AGM has been set for the 23-25 September 2019 at Alex Park Conference Centre on the beautiful Sunshine Coast in Qld.

- Theme: "I am not ashamed of the gospel - It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).
- Brochures with more information will be available soon.
- The 2018 ACC AGM and conference last year was a great success with nearly 300 people attending. This year we aim at sponsoring at least 100 young people to attend our camp/style conference with a program for our young people.
- We encourage local congregations to begin fundraising to help sponsor your young people.
- If any of our ACC members can sponsor one or two young people, that would be greatly appreciated. Approximate cost at this stage will be around \$250 per person which includes accommodation onsite and food.

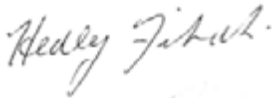
A Time to Act

We have laid out above, as best we can at this time, the ACC's pathway and program for the foreseeable future.

According to the resolutions of the 2018 ACC AGM we now invite all ACC member congregations **who believe that their relationship with the National Assembly of the UCA has fundamentally broken down** to hold a congregational meeting and formally consider accepting the offer by ACC of itself as a 'replacement Assembly' in matters vital to the life of the congregation, i.e., in matters theological, spiritual and relational in this context. In so doing the congregation declares that it continues to be a Uniting Church congregation adhering to The Basis of Union as part of the one, holy catholic and apostolic church. At such meetings, congregations may also decide to implement other suggestions made in this letter.

We ask for your continued prayers and support as we enter into what will be a very challenging future, but one where we will still experience, as we currently are, much joy, excitement and peace in living out our "calling" as the ACC of the UCA.

Grace and peace



Hedley Fihaki
On behalf of the National Council

Note: the decisions of the 2018 ACC AGM are included as an appendix on the right.

Appendix

Extract of the Minutes of The Annual General Meeting of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc. 17 -19 September 2018 held at Wesley Church, Wesley Mission 220 Pitt Street, Sydney

5.1 Future of the ACC: Resolved: That the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc:

- a) receive the Discussion Paper on the Future of the ACC dated 23 August 2018, and;
- b) change the words "within the Uniting Church in Australia" to "of the Uniting Church in Australia", and that the Constitution be changed accordingly.
- c) determine that, until such time as the Assembly of the UCA repents of its apostate decisions and returns to the faith of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, as that faith is described in the Basis of Union, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations humbly, and in dependence upon God alone, offers to Congregations the role of a replacement Assembly in matters vital to the life of its Confessing Congregations.
- d) encourage ACC member congregations and clusters to join an existing orthodox Presbytery that has rejected the UCA Assembly decision, and invite those presbyteries to realign themselves with the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, and;
- e) affirm the ACC National Council working with other networks seeking to establish orthodox non-geographical presbyteries for those congregations that are not part of an orthodox presbytery, and;
- f) affirm that the make-up of the ACC National Council be broadened, where the National Council considers it appropriate, to include up to three (3) members from those Presbyteries, groups and networks who have a similar purpose to the ACC regarding the direction of the UCA, and;
- g) encourage the ACC School of Faith to negotiate with like-minded evangelical theological and bible colleges in order to develop an alternative pathway for the teaching and training of candidates for ministry, ministry leaders and ministers, and;
- h) authorise the National Council to develop a support network for ACC ministers and leaders; and commit the ACC to provide support, encouragement and counsel to ministry agents, Congregations, clusters and groups who find it difficult to pursue evangelical, reformed and orthodox ministry; and,
- i) amend the ACC Constitution to accommodate Resolution 5.1 (b) along with the Amendment to Section 25.3 as outlined in Appendix A of the AGM Papers.
- j) in light of Resolutions 5.1 (b) & (c), the ACC accepts the responsibility for the spiritual and doctrinal oversight of its member Congregations; and encourages its member Congregations to advise the UCA Assembly of their Congregation's support for this action.

1 confessingcongregations.com/uploads/acc032_marriage_special_a5_lr.pdf

2 confessingcongregations.com/uploads/ACC_Marriage_Declaration_2016_Web_Version.pdf



PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

Hope in a turbulent world

Jesus said, 'When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ... The good news must first be preached to all nations' (Mk 13:10)

As he nears the cross Jesus speaks of turmoil ahead. The temple in Jerusalem, the centre of Israel's calling to worship God and so be a light to the nations, will be destroyed. And all nations will experience terrible natural disasters, international conflicts, disdain for human dignity and persecution.

Naturally, Jesus' alarmed followers want to know when these events will occur and, more urgently, when they will end. They want to be assured that, despite the 'gloom and doom' that hovers over human history and the church, God's good purposes for all nations will come to fruition in the end.

We can identify with them. We have known personal tragedy. We have seen the horrific effect of tyranny, famine, floods, tsunamis and earthquakes on vast numbers of people. We have heard harrowing stories of persecution of Christians in other parts of the world – the twentieth century infamously boasting the highest number of martyrs in history. In Australia we aren't suffering the loss of a central Church (like the Jerusalem temple), but we do grieve over its diminishing influence in public affairs, the closure of local congregations and widespread hostility to orthodox Christian belief, in and outside the church.

At times of severe strife some folk become preoccupied with predictions of the end of history. On the basis of awful events taking place in their own lives or in world 'trouble spots' (eg Middle East), and with this passage in hand, they conclude that the 'end is nigh.' In every generation, people have expected Christ's return on evidence of the awful events that surround them.

This passage seems to provide the

necessary proof. ... But they completely misread what Jesus says. *He tells the disciples to expect that life will be tough!* Terrible things in the lives of individuals, families, communities, nations and churches do not suggest that history is about to end.

In fact, such events should alert us to the danger of being taken-in by religious and political impostors. Either they will exploit our fears in order to offer us false comfort (v5) or pretend to be our friends but persecute us for disturbing the peace of the community and the church (v9&11ff). ... Such events should also alert us to our responsibility, amidst terrible conflict and suffering, to speak the word of hope (v10).

We have become used to thinking of Jesus as a friendly therapist who solves all our problems and always makes us positive and happy. It is a shock to find that he doesn't promise instant bliss or insider knowledge of the future. Instead, he speaks of the necessity of being 'aware' of what is happening in and around these troubling events. Disciples should be alert to but not alarmed by charlatans in their midst. (v5,7&9).

We must be utterly realistic. There is no place for illusions! We can take no comfort from the naïve belief that our religious or political ideals will bring peace and harmony to all nations.

Because there will always be 'wars and rumours of wars' we mustn't be fooled into thinking that we can end evil and suffering through education and goodwill.

Therefore, we must be sceptical about causes that promise to fix our problems and calm our fears. Christians are not to be taken-in either by *apocalyptic preachers* or *secular gurus* announcing the immanent arrival of some messianic figure or other self-proclaimed leaders of new faiths, new environmentalism or radical atheism.

Jesus' warning is plain: '*Take heed that no one leads you astray*' (v5). '*Don't go after charlatans*' (Lk 21:8). Don't be distracted from your vocation: '*the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations*' (v10). In the centre of the storms that threaten to engulf hope, we are to announce to all and sundry that, in Christ crucified-and-risen, evil has met its match. They are to declare that, in this event, 'all nations' may be assured that the 'end' of history – the ultimate purpose of our existence – will be marked by the 'end' of terror and persecution.

In the light of this promise, Jesus' disciples are called to live by hope. They are not to be unduly 'alarmed' about the state of the world but to live-out the Gospel in words-and-deeds. In the face of tragic and brutal events they are to 'beware' of becoming despondent or being swayed by the false hopes of impostors.

This doesn't mean that we should ignore evil and suffering and pretend that awful things don't matter. Living by hope in God's future means that we are to stand with those who suffer, and let others stand with us when we suffer. This is only possible because God, the Creator of all things, has triumphed over every form of evil in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. He is the sole reason for having confidence in the 'end' toward which history is headed.

Can we hear this word of hope today?

The magnitude of evil in the world makes us wary about the bold claim that a better world awaits. Indeed, we often wonder why a good, loving and all-powerful God doesn't bring the 'end' to such horrors now. Apart from acknowledging that our misuse of free-will causes dreadful things to happen, Christians cannot satisfactorily 'explain' why evil itself exists.

What we can and must say, in the light of God's self-revelation to the people of Israel and in the person of Christ, is that God's overarching purpose for human life is 'good' (Gen 1:31), that God wants us to live in peace with

[cont over...]

Loving Kindness

Ps 100:5

*“The Lord is good,
His loving kindness is everlasting,
His faithfulness to all generations.”*

The present moment, whether it be of joy or sadness,
always seems profoundly important for us.

Yet the Living Word is continually reminding us to
look beyond this present moment into God's eternity.

From the here and now

it is very difficult to comprehend
the eternity of God.

We cannot reason or understand the truth of these words.

It is only with hearts filled with love
that we can begin to comprehend such knowledge.

To say that God is “good”
seems inadequate to describe our heavenly Father.

He is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving.

Yet all our words seems inadequate to describe Him.

The Living Word describes Him as,

“loving-kindness” and “faithfulness to all generations”.

They are concepts beyond our understanding,
yet in our hearts we know that they are true.

Just to think of the significance of these words
fills our hearts with joy when we realise
that they were uttered over two thousand years
before Jesus came to fulfil their meaning.

So, let us every day,
lift ourselves from our earth-bound humanity
into the immensity of His “loving kindness”
which is “everlasting” and
acknowledge Him with joy.

*Reverend Bob Imms is a member of the
ACC Southern Cluster in Tasmania.*



him and each other, that God hates evil,
that God has redeemed us from sin, and
that God shall restore us to our original
purpose in the fullness of time.

Amidst terrible upheaval, we need to
see what is happening now, and through-
out history, in the context of the creation,
redemption and restoration of the whole
creation. We need to see things in the light
of the miracle of creation (at the begin-
ning), the miracle of grace (in the middle)
and the miracle of a new heaven and new
earth (at the end).

When we are preoccupied with our-
selves, it is easy to overlook God's *ultimate
purpose* for the world. But when we see
our lives in the light of the overarching
meaning of history, we may live by hope
that emboldens us to ‘proclaim’ God's
good purposes amidst turmoil.

We are called to be peace-makers in
places of conflict, to protest wherever
men, women and children are dehuman-
ized, to uphold the sanctity of life (from
conception to death), to stand beside
those who have lost their way, to welcome
strangers and outcasts etc. ...

If we are confident in the future that
God has already promised ‘in Christ,’ we
must speak against the many situations
in our world that are hostile to God's
good purposes. We mustn't let terrible
events divert us from the task of preach-
ing Christ crucified-and-risen as the one
in whom hope for our tortured world has
been enfleshed. It is not up to us to figure
out when God's grand purpose for hu-
manity shall come to fruition. It is enough
to ‘proclaim’ that God's power and love
have already been uniquely and decisively
displayed in the costly-and- victorious life
of Jesus Christ.

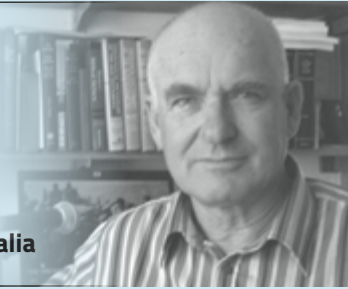
Seeing things in cosmic perspective
doesn't lessen our grief at suffering and
evil in the world. We are called to ‘*mourn
with those who mourn*’ (Mt 5:4), to ‘*hunger
and thirst after righteousness*’ (Mt 5:10)
and to expect opposition (Mt 5:11). But,
because of God's Christ-embodied love,
we may freely and confidently involve our-
selves in the broken world knowing that,
despite the dread power of evil that now
scars the earth, God shall, in his own time,
restore all things to the perfection that has
always been his will for humanity and the
creation.

Often this is hard to believe. We still
wonder why such horrors take place and
despair of finding a fully satisfactory
‘explanation.’ ... But, if we begin to see
such things in the context of God's over-
arching purpose for the world in Christ
incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended,
we shall be glad to have the privilege of
proclaiming the Gospel to all nations and
leave the future to God.

Jesus the Prodomos

Ian
Clarkson

UCA Minister - South Australia



The Prodomos referred to the tender vessel which rowed out to the large merchant ship as it approached the wharf in the ancient port of Alexandria. The seaman would lift the anchor and lanyard onto the small but sturdy prodomos carrying it safely to the wharf, fixing it there and then hauling the great ship to its safe berthing.

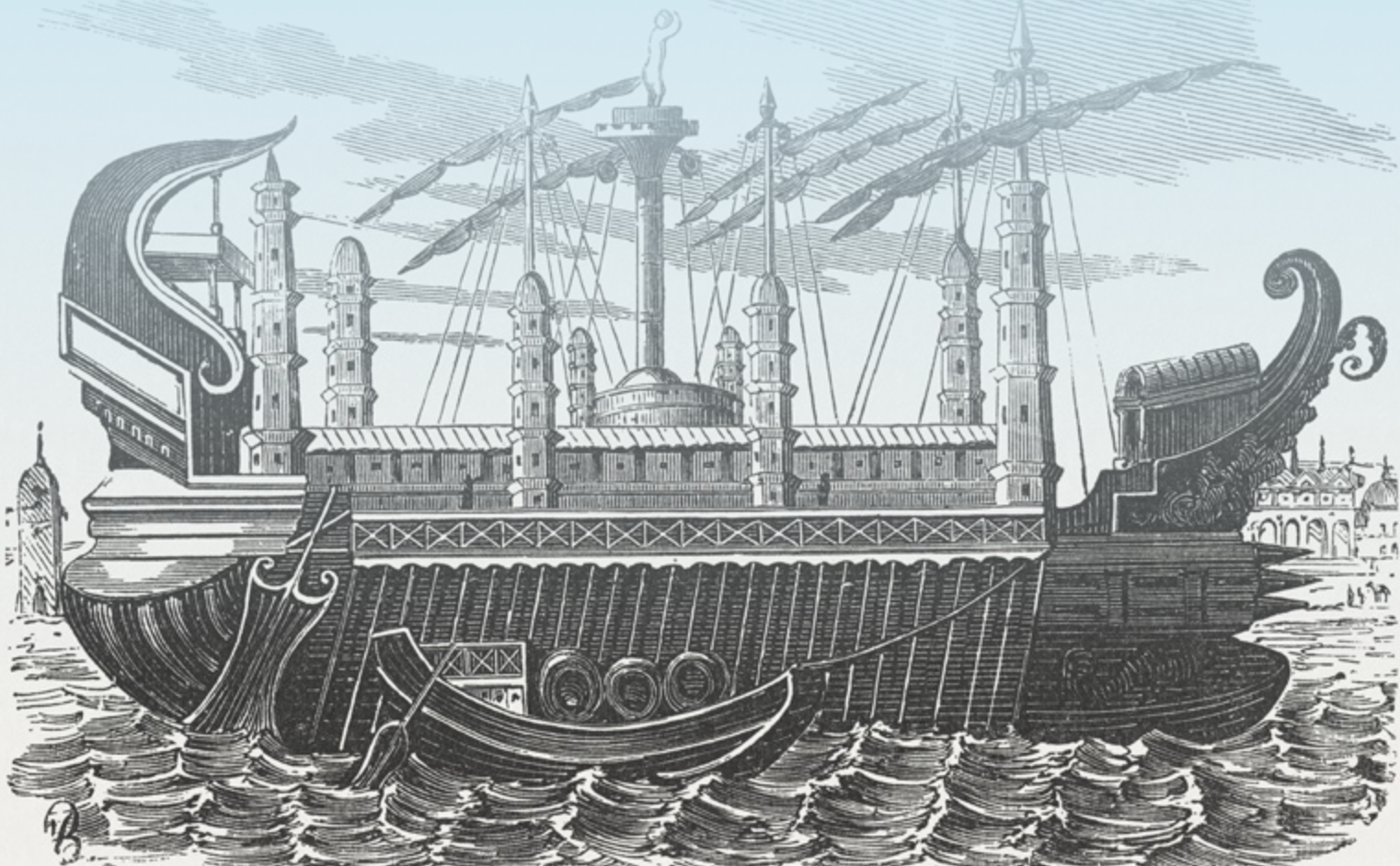
This is the name used for our Saviour, Jesus. He is the confessing churches' prodomos, or forerunner. He has carried the anchor of the souls of the great ship of the confessing church from all continents, across all peoples and down through the ages into its true home. He has

fixed it there, firm and fast, safe and sure. He is there thus so are we. In His resurrected flesh rests our flesh to be raised.

At the present you may be buffeted by waves of fear and winds of uncertainty. You may doubt your perceptions of the right and best path. Crippling news may have reached your ears. This is the time to cry out to the One who has gone before. And soon you will feel the unchanging certainty that you are anchored with Jesus and your hope is absolute and more real than any assault of your present circumstances.

Jesus has gone before. He has raced ahead of all the countless multitude of his church. It is he who has absorbed the fearful minefield of personal guilts real to his redeemed, in his own flesh. He has gone ahead and secured his goal of eternal redemption and safety for his confessing brothers and sisters.

What hope this is. Our heavenly Father has done all He can even swearing on his own character and glory to assure our hearts this is true. This promise is backed by his own moral sovereignty. So how can we honour his love? We can confess him unashamedly, delight in the grace of his law, keep ourselves in his love and commune with him. We can unreservedly seek his Kingdom and we can forgive others as he has forgiven us. Yes we can!



Introducing the ACC's

School of Faith



Dear Members, have you heard about the ACC's Confessing School of Faith? It's been taking shape over the last couple of years, but now is coming into sharper focus with the current crisis in the UCA. ACC is hearing the call from congregations and ministry leaders to provide real alternatives to the theological education and ministry training available through many of the UC colleges.

The aims of the Confessing School of Faith are:

1. To lay out the Christian faith as outlined in the Basis of Union, and what that means for us today;
2. To teach and disciple individual Christians and congregations to respond in faith to Christ's call, in worship, witness and service;
3. To resource individuals and congregations to engage the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Australia's multicultural and pluralist society.
4. To negotiate with like-minded evangelical theological and Bible colleges in order to develop an alternative pathway for the teaching and training of candidates for ministry, ministry leaders and ministers

To advance these aims, the School of Faith committee has been busy exploring and developing the following:

Basis of Union literacy

The School of Faith reaffirms its adherence to the Basis, which holds that the church's confession, worship, witness and service are controlled and ordered by:

- sole loyalty to Christ the living head of the Church;
- the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;
- being nourished and regulated by the Biblical witnesses;
- the creeds and Reformation witnesses;
- applying the learning of faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture;
- the faith of Christ Crucified as confessed by every member

An introductory course on the Basis is currently being written.

The Basis of Union is an important reference point, particularly for further theological study.

Lay Preacher Courses and pathways to Ministry

The School of Faith is approaching Reformed/Evangelical Colleges in order to compile a list of recommended accredited courses. The School of Faith will supply support and mentoring to ACC students as needed.

School of Faith Events

In the last few years the School of Faith has run several teaching events in different states (materials from these are available on the School of Faith website). Future events are being planned and will be advised on the website and ACC Facebook.

Resources on the School of Faith website

(www.confessingschooloffaith.com)

- Resources on the Basis of Union
- Historic confessional documents mentioned in the Basis and the creeds.
- Video series on different themes
- Articles and papers on different themes
- Videos of teaching events
- School of Faith Teachers' pages with written resources
- Prayer and Liturgical Resources

School of Faith Weekly Devotionals

School of Faith teachers and others are preparing weekly devotionals for 2019 that ACC members can receive by email or access on the website.

Contact:

accoffice@confessingcongregations.com



ACC Office: 02 9550 5358
www.confessingschooloffaith.com

School of Faith Coordinator: Rev Anne Hibbard

Protection of Religious Freedoms



Monica Doumit

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The protection of religious freedom is now an urgent matter in Australia. The 2016 census revealed that the largest religious category in Australia were those who professed ‘no religion,’ being 30.1% of the population. At 22.6% and 13.3% of the population respectively, the Catholic and Anglican

Churches are the next largest religious groupings, with all other faith groups each comprising less than 4% of the population. While 52% of Australians still identify as professing a Christian faith, the trend indicates that Christianity may soon be a minority faith in this country.

Issues of religious freedom have become even more pressing in the current social and political climate. Despite promises that no change to the marriage law would be made without simultaneous protection for religious freedoms, the law changed without any meaningful protections for people of faith.

Instead, the protection of religious freedom was referred to an Expert Panel chaired by Philip Ruddock earlier this year and, although the report has been completed and was handed to the Government back in May, the public has not seen it because it is on hold until a more politically convenient time.

But even without the contents of the review, we can be fairly certain of what it will say. The Ruddock review was the fifth inquiry into the protection of religious freedom to occur in Australia in the past three years, and all have found that religious freedom protections in this country are patchy and inadequate.

In addition to the same-sex marriage debate, there are other societal trends that point to a need to address these

matters urgently: certain state and territory governments have signalled an intention to limit or remove the few religious freedom protections in anti-discrimination laws; there is a propensity for activists to use anti-discrimination ‘lawfare’ to punish or silence those with whom they disagree, and there has been a recent shift in the openness of some elements of Australian society to religion and religious believers. For all its talk of tolerance, there are powerful influencers in our culture less and less tolerant of religion. There is now a more hard-edged determination to minimise the role of faith in everyday life and exclude it altogether from the public square.

This, my friends, is the climate in which we find ourselves today and the subject of this evening’s discussion.

At the beginning, I want to set the scene on where we are now for religious freedom from an international, national and local level, and look ahead to the Ruddock report being released and the potential response to that.

When we talk about religious freedom, it’s important to know that religious freedom encompasses theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, the freedom to not profess any belief, and the freedom to change those beliefs. It belongs not only to individuals, but to communities, because it is within religious communities that individuals seek religious truths and practice their faith.

The UN Human Rights Committee tells us that religious freedom encompasses a broad range of acts which include liturgies, the observance of dietary regulations, wearing of distinctive clothing, and the freedom to choose religious leaders and teachers, establish seminaries or religious schools, and prepare and distribute religious publications and texts.

These aspects of religious freedom – freedom for the exercise of religious belief – are often referred to as ‘positive’ religious freedom. Negative religious freedom is freedom from discrimination based on religious belief.

At international law, there are a lot of treaties and instruments that protect both positive and negative religious freedom, but the key one I want to discuss today is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). This document speaks of the freedom to hold and change a belief, and also to manifest it, subject only

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to limitations where required to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Now this is important, because the ICCPR also contains other rights, like the right to be free from discrimination; so what do we do when two or more rights conflict? The UN, in a document known as the Siracusa Principles, tells us that when rights conflict, special weight is to be given to what they call non-derogable rights, and freedom of religion is one of those. In other words, freedom of religion isn't just one right among many; it comes with a UN-endorsed trump card of sorts.

Despite the strong protections in existence in Australia, our protection for freedom of religion is inadequate.

Let me explain why.

It is often said that freedom of religion is protected in the Constitution, but it's not really. For starters, the constitutional protections only apply to laws passed at a federal level, and most of the risks to religious freedom come from the states. Also, the High Court has said that the Constitution only stops laws intended to restrict religious freedom. That a law in practice restricts freedom is not relevant, apparently.

In parts of Australia, and especially in NSW, both positive religious freedom and negative religious freedom do not enjoy the same protections as other grounds of discrimination, like sex, gender, marital status and the like.

In NSW, religious belief is not a protected attribute under anti-discrimination law. A business that is otherwise open to the public can hang "No Christians served here" signs in their windows and still be within the bounds of the law.

Last year, friends of mine who organise an event called Theology on Tap were told they could not make a booking for a space in a pub in Surry Hills because of the nature of the event, and there was absolutely no recourse for them at law. If the same pub refused service to an LGBTI

group, they could – and would – be sued.

A person could stand on a street corner in NSW and engage in religious vilification, and it would not be against the law. Have them stand on the same street corner and speak about the dangers of gender ideology, and they could be sued and obtain an apology and damages.

Then we move to positive religious freedom, that is, the ability to proactively practice your faith in public or in private, alone or in community with others, in worship or in the building and running of schools, hospitals and social services.

Australian law does very little to positively protect religious freedom; instead, the law protects people of faith through certain exemptions to anti-discrimination law. For example, the Catholic Church of my own tradition can have a male-only priesthood because of a specific exemption in the Sex Discrimination Act. We can insist that school principals of faith-based schools are themselves people of faith because of a specific exemption in the Australian Human Rights Commission Act and so on.

Religious freedom isn't seen as a right in and of itself; but rather a legal way for us to discriminate against others. That is, in part I think, why we have such a hard time trying to defend ourselves against threats to religious freedom because the way this freedom has been framed is as a license to discriminate against others.

And maybe that's been okay up until now. We haven't really ever talked about freedom of religion in terms of a positive right to believe or a positive right to practice, because our ability to do so has been taken for granted.

Until very recently, the importance of the free exercise of religion to Australia's social fabric has been largely uncontroversial. People of all faiths and none once recognised the contribution of Judeo-Christianity to Australia's laws and customs, and of religious believers to Australian society more generally.

Even if not believers themselves,

Australians committed to our nation's unwritten virtue of a 'fair go' were content to let people of faith practice their beliefs without interference from state or society. Many who are proudly Australian, or who aspire to be after fleeing persecution, treasure the generous space traditionally allowed in our law and culture for people to believe different things and practice their most deeply held beliefs.

Things have changed; obviously. While not solely responsible for the threats to religious freedom in Australia, the redefinition of marriage that occurred in December of last year did force many people to think about religious freedom and position themselves for or against it.

And what was the result of all that thinking?

When we think about religious freedom, most of us have our minds immediately go to the bakers, and whether or not they should have to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding. And while that is one of the questions – and an important one – because the baker question is not about being for or against same-sex marriage, but about whether or not you can be compelled, by the force of law, to use your skills to express or endorse a message with which you fundamentally disagree, it can be a little bit of a distraction.

The question of religious freedom goes much broader than bakers, important as they are. Here are just some of the questions we need to ask when we talk about the effect of the law on religious freedom.

Education

Will Christian schools be able to preference Christian teachers and other staff for employment, or will this be seen as faith-based discrimination against those who are not Christian?

Even more boldly, will Christian schools be able to insist on a commitment to the Christian ethos as a condition of employment, and be allowed to discipline a teacher who publicly goes against those standards?

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In the Northern Territory, a government discussion paper released last year looks like they are getting ready to remove that right from faith-based schools. The WA government has also made similar comments.

Will Christian schools be able to continue to preference Christian students for enrolment, or should enrolment be on a first-come, first-served basis? Again, the Northern Territory is looking to change this one. And in Ireland, the Education Minister has also indicated that they are looking at taking this right away.

Continuing with enrolment policies, will Christian schools be able to insist that an all-girls school only enrolls biological girls?

Related to this, will uniform policies, team sports, camping accommodation and toilet facilities based on a child's biology be allowed to continue in our schools?

We know that groups like the Yes Campaign and Amnesty International lobbied the Ruddock review for the removal of these types of protections; and the removal of public funding from those who fail to comply.

Will Christian schools be allowed to continue to teach a faith-based perspective on life, marriage, family, gender and sexuality? Or, like Brindabella Christian College in Canberra, will they receive threats from the education minister for daring to express a Christian view on marriage? Last year in the UK, the government's integration expert, Dame Louise Casey, told a government inquiry that it was "not okay" for Catholic schools to be against same-sex marriage, because it is not how we bring children up in this country.

Will schools be able to resist attempts to force them to teach LGBTI sex and gender education, in the name of anti-bullying? Or, like Jewish schools in the UK, will it become compulsory, with schools that refuse threatened with closure? Or, like schools in Ontario, Canada, will they be threatened with the removal of their government funding?

What about Special Religious Education (SRE) teachers in public

schools? How much longer will they be able to teach a faith-based perspective on life, marriage, gender and sexuality? In NSW, the position is tricky; I heard a few weeks ago of an SRE teacher who had been told not to return for presenting the Christian teaching on sexuality.

And will parents have the right to remove their children from classes that present religious or moral teachings that conflict with their beliefs, in the same way that public school parents are allowed to exempt their children from religious education classes?

Let's move from schools to our welfare services

Will groups like AngliCare or the Wesley Mission or St Vincent de Paul and others be able to preference Christians or those who share our ethos for employment? A Queensland court decided that St Vincent de Paul couldn't insist that its conference president be Catholic.

Will agencies be denied government contracts based on their religious beliefs? Groups that receive government funding have recently issued guidelines that say the government should be wary of granting emergency relief contracts to faith-based aid organisations because of their views on LGBTI issues.

In Canada, non-profit organisations have for years participated in the 'summer jobs' program, which provides a subsidy to charities and faith-groups willing to hire university students in the summer break. This year, those same groups were only eligible to participate if they signed a document where they accepted the right to abortion: even though it had no relevance to the program itself.

Will charities lose or be denied charitable or tax-deductibility status based on its views of marriage? Catholic adoption and foster care agencies in the UK lost their charitable status for refusing to place children with same-sex couples, even though LGBT charities are still allowed to only place kids with LGBT couples. And the Family First charity in New Zealand also lost its charita-

ble status after a government agency deemed that promotion of the traditional family was not for the public benefit (even though every reliable study on the matter will tell you that the public is benefitted by the presence of traditional families).

What about Christian pre- and post-marriage courses and counselling? Will they need to be open to same-sex couples? Just last month, a major Catholic marriage counselling service in Ireland announced that it would counsel same-sex couples as well, because if it didn't, its government funding would be removed.

Slightly more controversially, what about church ministries that encourage and support those Christians with same-sex attraction who want to live a life of chastity? Will they be able to still exist with foreshadowed bans on so-called conversion therapy?

Let's move on to facilities belonging to our faith-based institutions.

Exemptions to anti-discrimination laws apply to bodies established for religious purposes, but the case law is narrowing what that means. A recent Victorian case held that a company called Christian Youth Camps, established by the Christian Brethren, required to operate in accordance with the fundamental beliefs and doctrines of the Christian Brethren and aimed at communicating the Christian faith by creating an "obviously Christian" atmosphere – was not be a "body established for religious purposes" because it offered its campsite, for a fee, to non-Christians as well. For this reason, it could not refuse a camp for gay teens. Where does this leave other Christian conference and retreat centres?

Schools aren't considered to be bodies established for religious purposes, so their chapels are currently vulnerable to bookings for the same-sex weddings of former students.

What about speech? You would all, I'm sure, remember the case of Archbishop Julian Porteous who

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was taken to the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commission for distributing a pastoral letter about marriage to parents of children in Catholic schools. What you might not know about that case is that the person who made the complaint did not receive a copy of the booklet, but instead needed to go online and find it in order to be offended by it. And she was only prompted to do so after Australian Marriage Equality issued a media release, calling on its supporters in Tasmania to make complaints. Interestingly, all the Catholic Bishops released the same letter but, because the law in Tasmania is so opposed to religious freedom, it was intentionally chosen as the place for the claims to be made.

It is likely that the Archbishop Porteous case will be rectified as a result of the Ruddock review, but will the same protections for speech apply to those who aren't ministers of religion? Or will they risk being dragged before anti-discrimination tribunals? How much longer will it be until a speech like the one I am giving tonight becomes illegal?

Will there be any protection for them against losing their jobs if they express an unpopular opinion, like that 18 year old girl from Canberra who got fired for popping an "It's Okay To Say No" filter onto her Facebook profile? Or the federal public servant who was given an official warning after complaining that they felt the staff were under too much pressure to participate in a pride parade? Or William Englebrect, who lost his job at Townsville City Council for accidentally leaving his book about the consequences of same-sex marriage in the lunch room?

What about professional memberships and accreditations? Will doctors, psychologists, lawyers and others be considered to be appropriate members of those professions if they hold faith-based beliefs? The body responsible for regulating all of Australia's health practitioners, including doctors and psychologists, has put forward a new code of conduct which says that practition-

ers could be sanctioned, and even banned, if they express a public view on a matter that goes against the generally accepted view in the profession. This is troubling, given that the current position of the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Psychologists Association is pro- same-sex marriage, pro-gender reassignment, pro-abortion etc. Last month, Queensland's Dr David van Gend was again dragged before the Medical Board because he retweeted Lyle Shelton and Miranda Devine back in April.

And what about lawyers like myself? The NSW Law Society which is responsible for my registration is pro- same-sex marriage, as is the NSW Bar Association. Trinity Western University, a Christian college in Canada, cannot offer a law degree because certain Canadian law societies have refused to admit to practice any law graduates from that college. In the view of these law societies, and the Supreme Court that upheld their decision, students who agree to live by Biblical principles while studying at the university are too "homophobic" to serve the country as lawyers.

How much longer do university chaplaincies and faith-based societies have left before they are banned from operating, unless they open their leadership up to atheists, or stop holding pro-life or pro-marriage events on campus? My friends at Sydney University Catholic Society had a long-standing fight they had with the University about this one. In certain universities in the UK, faith-based student societies are not even permitted to hold stalls at the orientation days for new students, on the grounds that their presence may contribute to an unsafe environment.

And what about the rights of parents?

Will it be deemed a risk to children to raise them in a particular faith, and teach them to live in accordance with those beliefs? Will prospective adoptive and foster parents be required to take an LGBTI pledge before being allowed to look after kids? A Perth couple were refused

the ability to foster children because they failed the "Safe Schools" test on gender and sexuality.

And then we have our medical professionals. Will they be forced to participate in IVF procedures for same-sex couples? In gender reassignment or anything else?

Yes, it's a long list. I have been accused, more than once, of just scaremongering, but there are numerous examples of threats both here and overseas along these lines.

My friends, we cannot take our religious freedom for granted anymore. Enemies of Christianity want to relegate the practice of faith into the walls of a Church, and politicians without conviction will let them do it unless we stand up.

So, what can we do about it?

Obviously, the Ruddock Review, whenever the government chooses to release and respond to it, will be a focus of our energies. Make sure you're signed up to groups like the Australian Christian Lobby and others for updates about what is happening. In these times, we must join together with other Christian denominations in this fight. Yes, there are important theological differences amongst different groups, but the battle for religious freedom is one that concerns us all. So we need to work together.

Make sure you contact your local MP and those who will be seeking your vote in the next elections, both state and federal. We are just six months away from the state election, and no more than 8 months from the next federal one. Make sure your prospective MPs and Senators know that religious freedom is an urgent priority for you.

But also, make sure you exercise your religious freedom, daily. It will be so much easier for them to take it away from us if we don't care about it anyway. If Christian parents don't take an interest in what their kids are learning in school, then why would the government seek to protect it at law? If Christian organisations don't care about the Christian commitment of their staff, then why should the government? If, as I have seen

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in my own Catholic tradition, we abandon the practice of the confession, then why would an MP feel as if they needed to be courageous enough to defend it?

If we continue to speak Christian truth about life and love, marriage and family, then maybe doctors and other medical professionals, lawyers, teachers and public servants, might not be so easily sanctioned if they express the same view in our workplaces.

We best answer threats to religious freedom with courage and conviction. The more we see them coming for us, the more boldly we have to proclaim Christ. If we don't, then future generations, our children and grandchildren, will never know the freedoms we enjoy today.

There is a great saying, unfortunately made popular by the National Rifle Association which is used whenever there is suggestion that a law be passed limiting access to guns: "You can have my gun when you pry it from my cold, dead hands."

Now, I'm not endorsing the NRA or gun ownership – I think that guns in the USA should be banned – but we can learn something from their commitment.

In a sense, we also need to say: you can have our religious freedom when you pry it from our cold, dead hands. In a faith that was borne from the blood of the martyrs, and at a time when Christians around the world, in their tens of thousands, are being martyred for their faith, I do not say this in jest or even as an analogy. We need to be prepared to give our lives for the freedom to practise our faith.

But martyrdom, my friends, does not come in one grand act. Martyrdom, and preparation for it, comes in our commitment to prayer and our own striving for holiness, each and every day.

There may be a time, in the not too distant future, when gatherings like this become illegal or impossible because of the presence of protestors or the denial of venues in which to host them. A time when, as Justice Alito said in the Obergefell case in the US that legalised same-sex marriage, that "those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes", but not in public. A time when we will once again become an underground Church.

In these times, all that will be left

will be the ability to proclaim and pass on our faith by the witness of our lives. We will teach our children and grandchildren about the Christian view of marriage by the way we love our husbands and wives. We will teach about the dignity of each and every human person made in the image and likeness of God by the way we treat others. As St Paul says in Galatians 5:22-23, "The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, forbearance, meekness, faith, modesty, abstinence, charity. There is no law against such things."

In some ways, dear friends, I feel like I'm preaching to the choir. I know this community stands as a beacon with everything you do. So, keep doing it. Keep going forward. God bless you. Thank you for having me here.

Monica Doumit is a prominent writer, commentator and advisor on church matters, the law and bio-ethics and coordinates catholicstalk.com.au which provides clear, charitable and Catholic commentary on significant news items of the day.



Photo: Paul Francis

Creation, Cross & Crown

Rod
James

Minister of the Word - South Australia
Deputy Chair of the ACC



Creation, Cross and Crown
- three visions of life in Christ

The realities of creation, cross and crown may seem somewhat unrelated, but as we shall see, they are intimately connected in the life of a Christian. Rev Rod James continues this series in:

Part 2. The Cross

Having a theology of the cross

God's creation is glorious, and full of beauty and blessings. But it is also the scene of much evil and suffering. Human life is not just a bunch of roses, or simply a box of chocolates (Forrest Gump). In taking the three visions of creation, cross and crown we are placing in the middle, between the beauty of earth and the glory of heaven, the cross of Jesus Christ.

We must do this because an utterly contradictory thing has happened. Someone has taken a tree from the creation and fashioned it into an instrument of torture and horrible execution. They have jammed it into the earth, and upon it they have hung the Son of God, the One through whom the creation was made! In our 'three pictures of life in Christ', it is good to pause and be astonished at the contrast between our first picture, 'Creation', and our second picture, 'Cross'. The first speaks of beauty, harmony, joy and blessing; and the second speaks of enmity, brutality, injustice and blatant evil.

However, despite the curse of evil, sin and death, the creation is still sufficiently filled with the glory of God that we may be tempted to live in denial of that curse, and try to live focussing only on the glory that is reflected in God's beautiful world.

Luther's theology of the cross

500 years ago, Martin Luther spoke of a theology of the cross and a theology of glory. Now you may think, "Theology! I don't go there. I just have a simple faith." But 'theology' is made up of 'Theos', God, and 'Logos', word; i.e. the word about God, and all of us have a theol-

ogy - not an academic one, but a living, working theology. The important question is: is our theology the same as God's theology.

A theology of glory

By a theology of glory, Luther meant having a belief that focusses on human ability, achievement and triumph as God's image creatures. A theology of glory is native to our fallen human nature. Stung by sin, evil and death human pride determines to 'bounce back'. A theologian by the name of Timothy Palmer explains:

(Theologians of glory) operate on the assumption that what we need is optimistic encouragement, some flattery, some positive thinking, some support to build our self-esteem. Theologically speaking it operates on the assumption that we are not seriously addicted to sin, and that our improvement is both necessary and possible. We need a little boost in our desire to do good works.

In his Heidelberg Disputation, Luther wrote:

"Because people do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory [and] power". This love is all-consuming: The "desire for glory is not satisfied by the acquisition of glory, nor is the desire to rule satisfied by power and authority, nor is the desire for praise satisfied by praise".

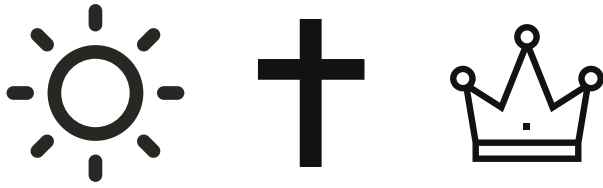
Thus, the seeking of personal glory is addictive, and in the Roman Catholic Church of Luther's day, this love of pomp, power and wealth was evident in the papacy and in the sellers of indulgences.

The "theologians of glory," therefore, are those who build their theology in the light of what they expect God to be like—and, surprise, surprise, they make God to look something like themselves. (Palmer)

A theology of the cross

Theologians of the cross, by contrast, base their faith on God's revelation of Himself in Christ crucified. Luther believed that we can know God only through Jesus and his cross. So Luther rejected what is called natural theology, which claims to know God simply through the creation He has made. He boldly asserted that "He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering... God can be found only in suffering and the cross." Another theologian, Karl Trueman says:

At the heart of this new theology was the notion that God reveals himself under his opposite; or, to express this another way, God achieves his intended purposes by doing the exact opposite of that which humans might expect. The supreme example of this is the cross itself: God triumphs over sin and evil by allowing sin and evil to triumph (apparently) over him. His real strength is demonstrated through apparent weakness. The apostle Paul understood this strange and unexpect-



ed truth, and laid it out plainly for us all in 1 Corinthians 1:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1 17-24

This strange revelation of God can be known only through the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Who would have thought up the foolish idea of God taking human flesh in order to die a horrendous death on behalf of sinners who had deliberately defied him, or God making sinners pure by himself becoming sin for them, or God himself raising up a people to newness of life by himself submitting to death? (Trueman)

So unlike human wisdom is the mind of God we need to realise that every theological term in the Bible needs to be re-understood. Trueman says:

Take for example the word power. When theologians of glory read about divine power in the Bible, or use the term in their own theology, they assume that it is analogous to human power. They suppose that they can arrive at an understanding of divine power by magnifying to an infinite degree the most powerful thing of which they can think. In light of the cross, however, this understanding of divine power is the very opposite of what divine power is all about. Divine power is revealed in the weakness of the cross, for it is in his apparent defeat at the hands of evil powers and corrupt earthly authorities that Jesus shows his divine power in the conquest of death and of all the powers of evil. So when a Christian talks about divine power, or even about church or Christian power, it is to be conceived of in terms of the cross—power hidden in the form of weakness.

All biblical terms must be reconceived in the light of the cross—life, blessing, holiness, righteousness. All are important theological concepts, and all are susceptible to human beings casting them in their own image. All must be recast in the light of the cross.

...against every assumption that human beings might make about who God is and how he acts, he requires no prior loveliness in the objects of his love; rather, his prior love creates that loveliness without

[cont over...]



Creation, Cross & Crown



laying down preconditions. Such a God is revealed with amazing and unexpected tenderness and beauty in the ugly and violent drama of the cross. (Trueman)

It has been so easy for Christians in all ages to wrongly understand the Kingdom of God, and wrongly understand what it means to be a follower of Christ. Even in the New Testament church the apostle Paul had to deal with the theology of glory in the church at Corinth. He contrasts their way of life with that of the apostles.

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labour, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. 1 Corinthians 4:8-13

Throughout history we can see how a theology of glory has overtaken Christians with disappointing results as Christianity became associated with the acquisition of power, wealth and glory. The Crusades in the thirteenth century, the Spanish Conquistadors in central America, wealthy Christians exploiting slaves in America, the British Raj in India, grand cathedrals, rituals and vestments in England, prosperity theology in league with Western materialism, Christians preferring the upmarket suburbs to the dwelling places of the poor and needy. Speaking in an American context, Trueman laments that:

the cultural norms of many churches seem no different to the cultural norms of—well, the culture. They often indicate an attitude to power and influence that sees these things as directly related to size, market share, consumerist packaging, aesthetics, youth culture, media appearances, swagger and the all-round noise and pyrotechnics we associate with modern cinema rather than New Testament Christianity. These are surely more akin to what Luther would have regarded as symptomatic of the presence and influence of theologians of glory rather than the cross.

A theology of the cross, like Jesus' crucifixion, always stands in stark contrast to the attitudes and aspirations of human culture. Love and self-sacrifice are contrasted with self-interest and prosperity. Luther again:

“The love of God which lives in a person loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order

to make them righteous, good, wise and strong... This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which . . . confers good upon the bad and needy.”

A 'daily' theology of the cross

Some may think that the suffering of the cross is something that Christians need to dwell on but then go on to the resurrection and life in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. From this perspective, having a perpetual theology of the cross would seem imbalanced or incomplete. While we do live in the power of the resurrection and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the reality is that, every day, Jesus continues to be rejected and crucified in his body of believers, and through them he is still taking the way of the cross by living daily among the poor, bearing the burdens of the sick, disabled and dispossessed, speaking courageously against evil powers in the world. Consequently, he says to everyone who has ears to hear,

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”
Luke 9:23-24

In the joy and hope of the resurrection, and in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit the believer thus denies him/herself, takes up his/her cross daily, and follows Christ.

The believer is king of everything by being a servant of everyone; the believer is completely free by being subject to all. As Christ demonstrated his kingship and power by death on the cross, so the believer does by giving himself or herself unconditionally to the aid of others. We are to be, as Luther puts it, little Christs to our neighbours, for in so doing we find our true identity as children of God. (Trueman)

A call to die and rise again

I can remember when I answered God's call, nearly 50 years ago, to leave the farm and become a Minister of the Word. When I told people about that it often seemed to mean something different to them. Some interpreted it as simply a career change; a move from one profession to another. Some quipped, “Oh well, you will still be a shepherd”. But it seemed to me like a call to come and die with Christ. A call to deny my very self, a happy, respected, successful farmer boy, to take up my cross of offensive religion, and to follow him, the crucified and risen one. In that sense it was, from the world's point of view, illogical, unexplainable, and quite insane, an affront to all that the world held dear. But, I am happy to report, it resulted in a resurrection into a new life, a life in Christ.

If we were to simply live comfortably in God's beautiful creation without having an everyday theology of the cross, we would miss the essence of our life in Christ and also miss the joy that comes from suffering with him in order that we might be glorified with him (Romans 8:17).

Part 3 will be included in the June 2018 ACCatalyst.

Implications for Ministry

Warren Clarnette

Former Editor of *Church and Nation*
and *ACCatalyst* pioneer (2007)



*And I saw no temple in the city,
for its temple is the Lord God the
Almighty and the Lamb.*

PART 1 Ministry in question

The worst-known of all biblical books, Revelation is concerned with the meaning of history, though it throws no light on current events. Instead, it declares that eternity is present in time, that the City of God casts a tantalising light on the cities of this world.

At the risk of deploying *Revelation* in the service of ecclesiological techniques, an isolated and intriguing text may be of service to Christian ministers caught up in the modern crisis of the church. Could it be that the absence of a temple is the holy city's dominant feature, rather than its architectural splendour or the end of tears, pain and death (v. 4)?

Does its uniqueness lie in the fact that mankind's destiny consists neither in personal salvation nor political utopia, nor even the repristination of history, but the final reconciliation of Man with God and God with Man?

If this is so, the city's dimensions are merely the stage on which is played out the astonishing spectacle of mankind's inglorious glory swallowed up in the brilliance of divine glory as the final act of the drama of creation.

History as imagined alike by devout believers, grudging half-believers and atheists is transformed as if by divine alchemy. Goodness and badness, so fully displayed in the body of Revelation as the pattern of history, stand forth in chapter 21 as the transformation but not the extinguishment of mankind's tawdry, besmirched, egocentric, proud and all-too-human glory.

Our sophisticated minds may find this a simplistic mythological fantasy. Yet in the peculiar code of the Bible we read that "the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into (the city of God)" (v.24-26) The glory of kings is not the ephemeral brilliance of human overlords. It is the artistry and artisanship, the toil and failures, the ideals and loves, the hopes and beliefs of the governed, together

with their endless corruption, venality and sin. The glory of mankind is its humanity. (18: 11-24)

Holiness and profanity are thus woven together in the historic record, but profanity does not survive. "Nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life." (v.27)

Alone among all cities the City of God has no temple because divine glory has replaced the peaks of human glory. Human hubris is revealed as wasted effort. Restless self-promotion is anaesthetised. Lies are exposed. The swamp of politics is drained. The Augean stables are sanitised. Nations walk in the light of God's glory.

Amid rising impatience with Christianity here is counsel for priests, ministers and pastors whose social usefulness has in recent decades receded almost to the point of irrelevance. Here are clues to ministry that is distinctive and respected.

Since baptisms, marriages, funerals and pastoral care were assumed by secular authorities and practices, little is left for the ordained except the dubious celebrity of denominational office or recourse to 'spiritual' cults masquerading as the mission of Christ. Modern societies teem with secular celebrants, psychologists, social workers, human resource managers and life coaches.

An ontological crisis confronts ordained Christians. Preachers, no longer in high demand, demand little of themselves as they realise that public expectation of sermons has plummeted, thanks to the far greater persuasive power of professional media communicators over parishioners as well as all other citizens.

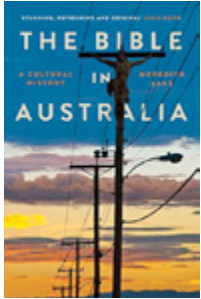
Pastors, lacking professional status, defer to the higher authority of accredited counsellors and psychologists. Pastoral skills attract little public demand. The clergy are like telex salesmen in an age of smart phones, or typewriters in a world of computers.

To be sure, even though the foundations are shaking in the City of Man, temples remain and new ones are built, despite Christianity's declining social cachet. But more is at stake than the function and work habits of the clergy.

In the city replete with temples ministers indulge themselves in orders of sanctity without spiritual authority or celebrity. Only those - clergy and laity - who seek the truth of the gospel, remain as light-bearers of reasonable service, despite the deceit, malice and wilfulness that inevitably cling to them under the iron law of human fallibility.

Surprisingly, Revelation makes no mention of ministry. Martyrdom is honoured only in passing. The meaning is clear. "You also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say 'We are unworthy servants', we have only done what was our duty.'" (Luke 17:10)

A Cultural History



The Bible in Australia

Newsouth Publishing
2018

Written by Meredith Lake

Reviewed by Peter Bentley

A short explanation of what this book is about is found in the subtitle - A Cultural History. This book provides a picture of how the bible's influence and impact has connected with Australian history and culture. It considers how the bible has been used and misused, and perhaps 'not used', in the context of the foundation and development of modern Australia. Meredith Lake has created a rare offering - a readable scholarly academic work.

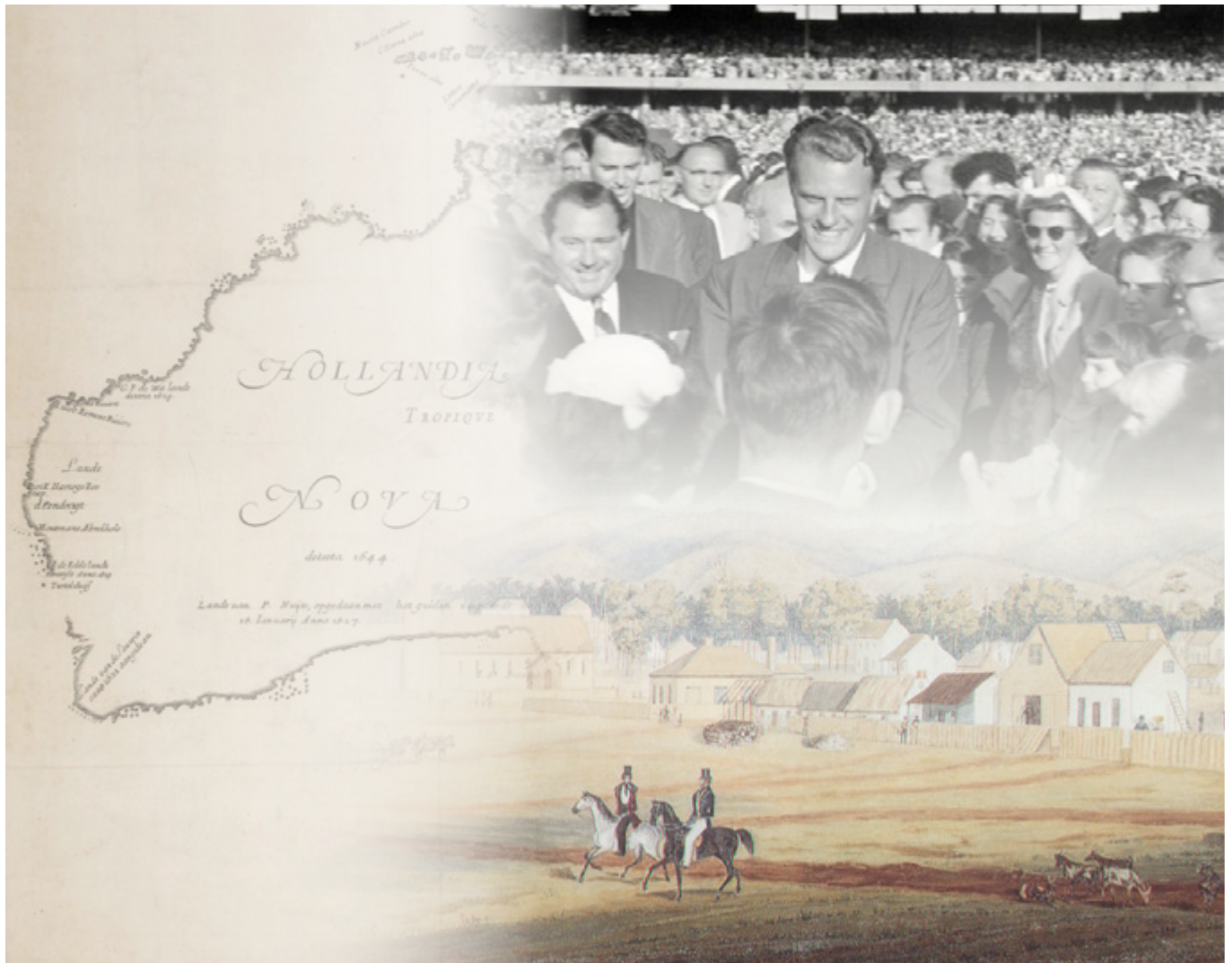
There are four parts:

Colonial Foundations

The opening section considers the arrival of the bible in 1788 and initial interactions in the convict era, and the overall immigrant context as the nation develops. Woven throughout the first part and indeed through the whole book are stories, and examples of connection related to Aboriginal and Islander people, especially in relation to translation and hearing the word in their own tongue, and the wider questions about indigenous theology and relationships.

The Great Age of the Bible

This part provides an excellent overview of the incredible stories of missionary endeavour and promulgation of the bible and the beginnings of the consideration of different ways of viewing the bible, its authority and status.



Bible and Nation

The third part looks at the place of the church (and bible) in Australia in the context of a consolidated Australia that was finding its own identity. A revealing chapter is the chapter on WWI and its aftermath. As it has been revealed during these WWI centenary years, the impact of this era has often been underestimated.

The final part **A Secular Australia?** Explores the place of the bible in the new era, looking at the changes in society and the impact of change on the church and the place of the bible. I noted quotes from people who would be known to ACC readers, including Deane Meatheringham in reference to his conversion at the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade. In this 60th year anniversary of the Crusade, it is illuminating to reflect on the differences in Australia in terms of our cultural history.

The chapter 'The Bible in the new millennium' vividly highlights the pace of change, especially in the context of SRE (and certainly the fact that this is now the sole area of contact with the bible for a large

group of Australians), and the impact of new technology and how this relates to reading and understanding the bible.

Having highlighted this book's accessibility and wide-ranging material, I am still going to suggest that an abridged version is needed (not the twitter form), but more a pocket version that summarises and yet continues the main themes and ideas.

I found the last few pages especially fascinating and helpful as they raise the context for a wider discussion. These pages form a very interesting conclusion in the context of ethics and decision-making. It is a question I have long been asking - how do people make decisions today when for many there is no association with a book like The Bible?

The conclusion takes one back to earlier discussions and ongoing themes in the book about the cultural impact of the church and its role in providing for the common good in society. This enables one to understand, consider and discuss in hopefully a helpful way the continuing role of the bible today.

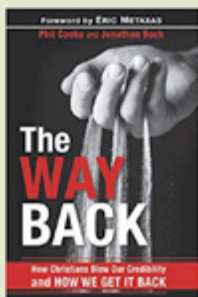
Dr Meredith Lake

Meredith is an award-winning writer interested in the ways Australians have understood the big questions of faith and meaning, and how that has played out in society and culture.

She studied at Sydney University with some of the leading cultural historians in the country. Her PhD research explored religious ideas of the environment in early colonial Australia.

Since 2009, she has worked in the education and not-for-profit sectors, telling true stories about history, faith and culture. She is currently an Honorary Associate of the Department of History, Sydney University.

BOOK REVIEW



The Way Back

How Christians Blew Our Credibility and How We Get It Back

Written by Phil Cooke & Jonathan Bock

Reviewed by Peter Bentley

Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbours. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honourable behaviour, and they will give honour to God when he judges the world.

1 Peter 2:12 (NLT)

First, I need to highlight that this is a book that looks at how the church and Christians relate to society and not the issues and nature facing the church internally. The context is evangelical faith in the USA, so the context for the reflection is how that evangelical com-

munity essentially blew it by becoming too associated with politics and the culture wars. It is not an apologia for liberal Christianity and a call to adopt the culture of the day. It is a simple challenge for Christians to become more the people of 'the way'.

The two authors have both been involved in a wider media and communication ministry and network and are well placed to report on the perceptions of society and change in how Christians and the church are viewed and provide pointed reflections on where we are and what to do.

Phil Cooke will be known to a number of readers as he has spoken in Australia and was a lead interviewee on the Andrew Denton documentary God on Our Side (this looked at evangelicals and their support for George W Bush in the context of the US National Religious Broadcasters Convention in 2006). Phil's blog (search philcooke.com) provides short reflections and practical examples and ideas to encourage people to re-think their way of doing things.

Of greatest help though in this book is the focus on our personal Christian lives and a call to renew our Christian walk. As we become more people of the way our hope is that people will see the way themselves.

PRAYER

Prayers of Praise & Thanksgiving

Heavenly Father,

We praise you and thank you for your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, the Living Head of the church. We thank you that he comes, addresses and deals with us so that we might live and endure through the changes of history through the news of his completed work.

We thank you that the Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and obedience of the Church are nourished and regulated by the Biblical witnesses and that when the Church preaches Jesus Christ her message is controlled by them.

We thank you that you have called the Uniting Church to live and work within the faith and unity of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church as that way is described in the Basis of Union.

Prayers of lament and confession

We come humbly before you in sorrow for the Uniting Church in Australia. We grieve that the Assembly Decision on marriage holds. We cry out to you Almighty God to have mercy upon us as our church where now the “ruling authority” of the UCA has become “a diversity of religious beliefs and ethical understandings” (R64).

- Forgive us when we too have stumbled and bowed down to this god of the age, the new diversity that demands there be no other but it.
- Forgive us when we have been silent instead of speaking the truth of the gospel.
- Forgive us when we have compromised for our own security and safety, the teaching of Scripture and the Basis of Union in the UCA.
- Forgive us when we have denied the importance of living within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.
- Forgive us for forgetting that Christ alone is supreme in the church and allowing his voice not to be the one and only, but just one among a myriad.
- Forgive us when we have spoken the truth in harsh arrogant ways closing our hearts to the possibility of your grace.

We praise you for the gift of Christ’s blood poured out, so that all who repent and believe might have forgiveness and new life.

Thank you too for the gift of the Spirit that constantly corrects that which is wrong (erroneous) in our life and in the life of the UCA.

Prayers of intercession

We grieve for the many members and even congregations who have left the UCA in the last few months and those who are still considering what to do. May you grant provision, guidance and strength for each one. Provide for those who no longer have a spiritual home both those in the UCA and those who have left.

We pray that our leaders would begin to grieve for the “unity in diversity” that is causing so much heartache and division. We pray for those who have departed from the faith of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church by ignoring the witness of Scripture and the Tradition of the Church consistent with the Scriptures. When division comes to the church through the disobedience of those in authority help us to extend your love and reconciliation to those who have strayed from the truth. Grant us the strength, boldness, strategy, humility and compassion to be a fellowship of reconciliation using our diverse gifts that Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

We pray for our Congregations that they may stand firm, and be a true witness to your love shown to us in Jesus Christ: compassionate judgement, with forgiveness and hope. And may we be hospitable places for those who wish to worship and serve you in Spirit and in Truth with joy.

We pray for the Ministers of the Word and church leaders in the UCA who are struggling to know how to remain true to you and also to respect the structure and authority in the UCA. It seems for many of us these two are becoming incompatible and our integrity is dividing. We give you thanks for the courage of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations becoming a replacement Assembly that can help both congregations and ministers alike to find a place of belonging without leaving the UCA. Thank you that this is a ministry of reconciliation where a divided integrity by your grace can become whole. Help the ACC to serve humbly, seeking your will and way at each step.

Continue to fill us with your Holy Spirit. Fill us with passion for Christ’s commission, so that others may see our good works and praise our Father who is in heaven.

By your grace and for your glory, in this time of great uncertainty, help us to:

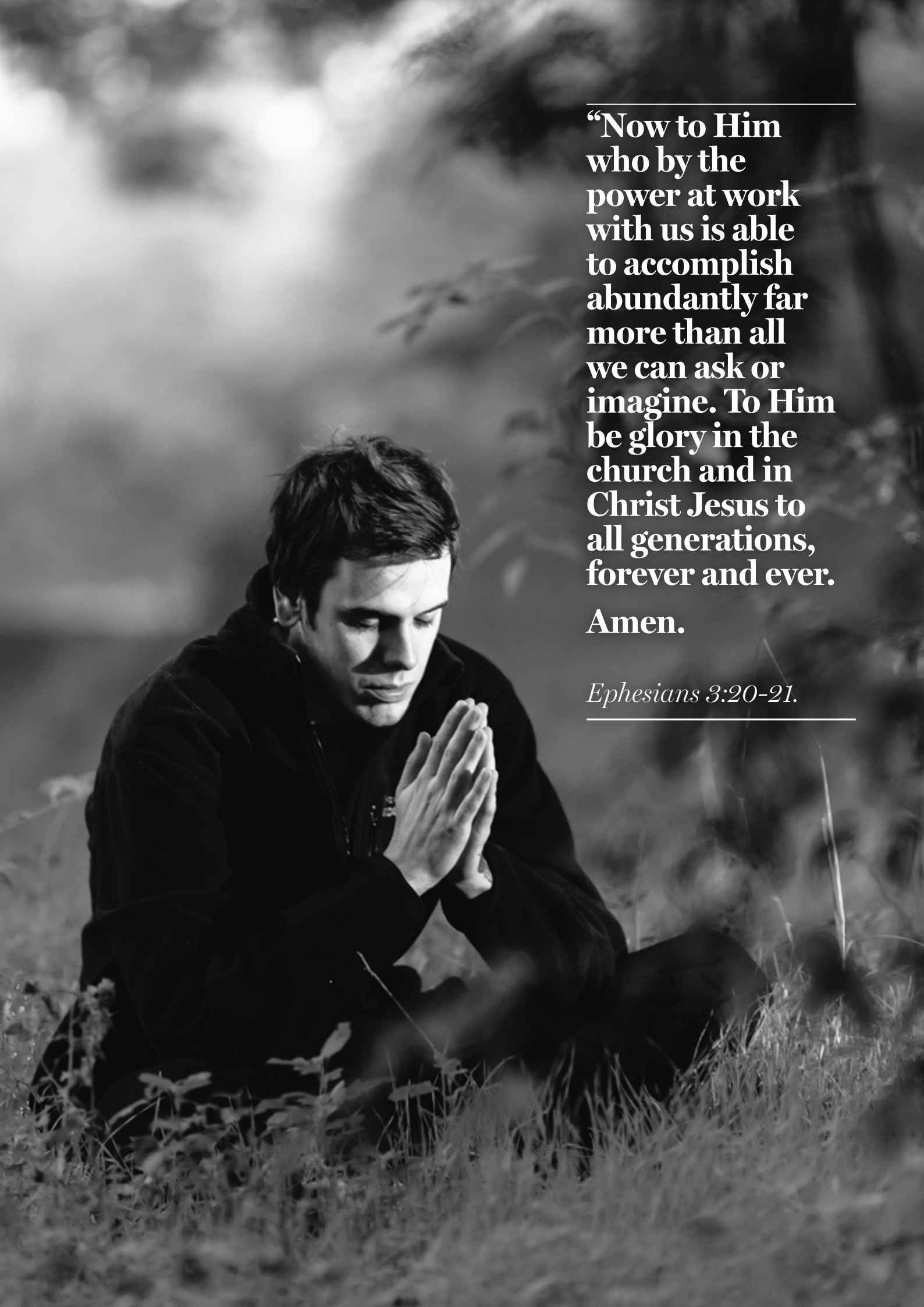
*Confess the Lord Jesus Christ,
Proclaim the Truth
and Renew the Church.*

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church we pray
Amen.

Rev. Anne Hibbard is the School of Faith and Prayer Coordinator for the Assembly of Confessing Congregations

**“Now to Him
who by the
power at work
with us is able
to accomplish
abundantly far
more than all
we can ask or
imagine. To Him
be glory in the
church and in
Christ Jesus to
all generations,
forever and ever.
Amen.**

Ephesians 3:20-21.



Liberal Theology

Peter Bentley

ACC National Director



The Liberal Theological Development of the Uniting Church

The current debate about sexuality in the UCA would not have arisen to the extent it has without a prominent liberal theological presence in the wider councils of the church, especially the Assembly. A question I am often asked when I visit congregations is how did we get to this place? Another question is: Why has the UCA developed an overt liberal theological orientation (especially when its membership has been largely theologically conservative)?

While many PhD theses could be written about these questions, I note below some brief points and comments. These points are expanded on in my earlier articles available on the UnitingViews website and in a revised article taking into account more recent developments.

1 Heritage

Given the context of union, the UCA was always destined to become more theologically liberal than the antecedent denominations because in the case of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism most of the more conservative ministers, and a good section of the more conservative members stayed out of union. It is worth noting that Victoria was the only state to have more Presbyterians enter union than Methodists. The larger base of former liberal Presbyterian ministers made Victoria into a more overt liberal state that soon overwhelmed Tasmania as well.

2 The Interim Report on Sexuality (IRS)

Liberal theology was spurred on by the didactic report of the Task Group on Sexuality (1991-1997). The Victorian base of the Task Group, the process adopted, the IRS (1996), and the final report itself (1997), helped to provide a foundation for public liberal theology as well as entrenching the polarisation during these formative years of the UCA.

3 Leadership of Officers and Members, particularly in the Assembly

Before the Task Group on Sexuality the liberal theologi-

cal section of the church had strengthened its involvement in the growing institutional life of the church (especially the Assembly), and following it maintained significant influence through membership on key Synod and Assembly committees which contribute to the overall directional leadership of the church. As liberal leaders have moved into Presbytery positions, presbyteries have also come under the influence of the liberal school of direction. Over time, more and more of the theological liberal members of presbytery and synod gained election to the Assembly, leading eventually to the dominance that exists today.

4 Theological Training

Theological training in the UCA developed towards a general progressive and theologically liberal character (with some individual and Synod exceptions at times) and over time more liberal theological ministers were produced, often then ending up in moderate-evangelical congregations with the result usually being decimation or slow bleeding out and/or conversion of the congregation to a neutered faith or an ideological liberal theology.

5 Attitudes to Sexuality in a changing society

The growing public discussion, influence and position of homosexual people in society in the 1970s and 1980s provided a pointer to how homosexuality would become a major focus for the church. As the UC became more focussed on 'loving our neighbour' through provision of good works and community services and a certain understanding of social justice, sections of the church began to equate 'loving God' with 'loving our neighbour' and supporting their personal needs a priority. As society moved toward support of the GLBTIQ agenda, parts of the church saw this as a natural step as well.

6 The dominance of personal story in UCA theology

It is an irony that the UC has produced critics of Pentecostal and charismatic theology because of their perceived focus on experience, and yet within the public voice of liberal theology, personal experience is the cornerstone of UCA theology and personalisation of the debate has played a very significant role in the councils of the church. The bottom line is: personal story today trumps the story and theology of the bible.



Summary

Up until the 2003 Assembly there were enough evangelicals and moderates at the Assembly meeting to ensure no major radical sexual agenda crept in at least by defined resolution. The agenda was not forgotten though and by 2003, the sexual agenda pushed again and the start in terms of resolutions, R84, opened the door for the future liberal pattern. The three areas in which the UCA has traditionally been identified:

- * Ecumenical Relationships
- * Relationships with Aboriginal and Islander members
- * Multicultural and cross-cultural relationships

had slowed the adoption of the sexual agenda, but they had become more sidelined in favour of a focus on the place of gay and lesbian people in the church.

In the 1997 Assembly, it was the Church's broad commitment to these three areas that helped to affirm the church's traditional understanding on marriage. Since 2003, the increasing focus on the need to make a more defined commitment to gay and lesbian ministers and members in the church eventually produced the outcome at the 2018 Assembly. Once the Australian parliament had changed marriage, it was clear what was the next step for the dominant liberal theological group, even though the majority of UCA members were not supportive of same-gender marriage. For the liberal members at the Assembly they had already moved with the direction of Australia and it would have been more unusual to have not gone down that path.

Some of the Faces of ACC's

School of Faith



*Katherine
Abetz*



*Walter
Abetz*



*Anne
Hibbard*



*Rod
James*



*Peter
Bentley*



*David
Kowalick*

FROM GABRIEL'S GRANDMA

Musings of a grandmother

I had a very busy couple of months after Gabriel was born travelling regularly to visit him and help my daughter Bella. It was worth it. What a joy being a grandmother, although I found I overdid it a little and ended up sick. I'll have to take it a bit easier so I can be here in the long haul for Gabriel.

Most Sundays I preach at different places on the northern end of the Central Coast, NSW. At first glance it looks like there are very few children in the congregations. There are lots of shades of white and grey hair including flecks of my own. However, since having Gabriel the Lord has reminded me that there are many children in the hearts of the members. Almost everyone has grandchildren, great grandchildren, great nieces or nephews that they love and care about. But more importantly there are those in the congregation who long for the children in their life to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ too. They pray regularly for them that this may come to be.

The Psalmist talks about the importance of passing on the faith to the next generation. He says:

*Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvellous deeds.
Even when I am old and grey,
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come.
Psalm 71:17-18 (NIV)*



In the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, we have children in our midst, even in those congregations that have none physically present. The children are in the hearts of our members. The passing on of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to them is very important. We are to "declare" God's "power to the next generation". Even if they do not go to a Uniting Church or Confessing Congregation it does not matter. What matters is that they find Christ for themselves. May the Lord Jesus Christ grant us the grace to be bold in our confession of faith in word and deed, in the great harvest ground of our families.

We may not see the fruit of our love, prayers and words in this life. The Psalmist didn't ask for that, but rather for the Lord's presence and help in being faithful with his own confession. May we have this same perseverance in passing on Christ to the next generation, to the children in our hearts.

Rev. Anne Hibbard is the School of Faith and Prayer Coordinator for the Assembly of Confessing Congregations

REFLECTION

A Word for Today

"Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:3-5).

By the fact of our guilty sinful natures and rebellion, all of us were under the holy wrath of God. God can never accept or tolerate any sin. If God were to overlook even one sin he would be corrupt and his holiness would be destroyed. God always has righteous anger against sin and therefore we stood under that wrath. God's love for us meant that he sought to bear this wrath in Jesus' body on the cross. There Jesus took that holy wrath and punishment which we deserved so that we who trust in Him might no longer be God's enemies but his friends - his children. How great is the love and mercy of our God?

Because of Jesus God is no longer angry with us. Will you find peace with God through believing in Jesus, or will you remain under God's holy wrath? (John 3:36).

Prayer

Oh Father and giver of life, thank you that you have shown us your incredible mercy and dealt with all the muck in our lives through Jesus. Father we know that we don't deserve anything and we can't repay or offer you anything of any worth and can only live in awe of all the pain that you went through for us. Father thank you that you gave us a hope and a future so that we have a new life through Christ and are born anew. What amazing love that we are totally new and alive all through your grace and mercy. That you can actually love us even though at times we have disagreed with your ways and wanted things our way. Amen

Devotionals are provided by Rev. Derek Schiller (Minister of the Word at St George Uniting Church, Qld), and are available via an APP for iPhone or Android. Each day a new devotion is provided. You can download the APP from the St George or ACC Website.



CONFESSING MOVEMENT



I am not ashamed of the Gospel

It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believe.

Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia

2019 ACC National Conference & Annual General Meeting

1.30 pm Monday 23 September – 12.30 pm Wednesday 25 September

Alexandra Park Conference Centre | Alexandra Headland, Sunshine Coast

Registration available from April 2019 (See ACC website)

THIS IS THE ACC

Who we are

Within the Uniting Church context of a very broad range of theology and practice, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is a nationwide body of congregations and individuals whose vision is confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church.

Our goals include

- Encouraging the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's Basis of Union.
- Providing resources, seminars and conferences to build up believers, develop their gifts, and equip them for life, mission and works of service.
- Encouraging Christian believers in earnest prayer through our Prayer Network.
- Encouraging younger members of the Uniting Church in their faith and participation.
- Communicating about current events and issues through our website, our national magazine *ACCatalyst* and local newsletters.

The objectives of the ACC

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

- To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
 - upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting

Church's faith and life;

ii) calling the Uniting Church to determine matters of doctrine and ethics according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;

iii) calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:

iv) providing biblically-grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;

v) developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and

vi) establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

b) To undertake such religious, educational or other charitable activities which are incidental to the above objectives.

How to join us

Membership rates for supporting members:

- ☎ Concession (single or couple):
\$20.00 pa. (financial year basis)
- ☎ Full (single or couples):
\$40.00 p.a. (*see website*)

☎ Contact (02) 9550 5358.

☎ Email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com

☎ Post: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042



Acts - the TV Series



A.D. The Bible Continues (2015)

Starring: Richard Coyle, Adam Levy, Joanne Whalley

Written by: Simon Block, Ben Newman, Tom Grieves

Directed by: Ciaran Donnelly
Produced by: Mark Burnett

The 'sequel' to *The Bible* (2013) TV series, was originally shown on Australian TV with the title *A.D. Kingdom and Empire* in 2015 and is now available on some subscription channels. Even though the series is based on the first ten chapters of the *Book of Acts*, the latter title is a more accurate description as it is more a biblical Game of Thrones than a historical docudrama rendition of the Bible stories. The last episode of *The Bible* series provided a shorter consideration of some key parts of the Book of Acts. The A.D. series has 12 episodes, with the first two connecting with the previous series *The Bible* and acting to remind or introduce viewers to the context of the new Christian community with a focus on the death and resurrection of Christ.

This series is similar to the SBS aired *Vikings* in terms of its historical accuracy (lack thereof) and use of truncated time-lines and re-arrangement of historical figures to suit an overall story, rather than a series based solely on the biblical text and historical sources. There is a good amount of creative licence (they are filling in 12 hours or so of material), but there are also some good scenes of biblical message and interaction. The main issue for me is that it suffers from the curse of contemporary television; the reality TV show, and so focusses on personalities and individual perspectives, rather than providing a holistic theology of the bible. Too often, (especially in the later episodes), the main characters are reduced to emotional caricatures in the attempt to personalise them. Essentially it is Hollywood-style television aimed at a nominal Christian audience and culture.

If you watch, have your bible ready and take the opportunity to review and work out what is biblically based and where the creative licence comes in.



New Life (2016) PG

Starring: Barry Corbin, James Marsters, Terry O'Quinn, Irma Hall

Written by: Erin Bethea, Josh Spake, Candice Irion, Drew Waters

Directed by: Drew Waters
Produced by: Arthur Bernstein

New Life had a limited Australian release in December 2018 (it was produced in the USA in 2016) and is available through *Movies Change People* (Heritage Films). *New Life* is not a Christian film in the defined US tradition, but a film in the 'Hallmark' style tradition of stories about life, family and love. It raises questions about life and being in the context of the friendship and love of two childhood friends, and links into other more well-known commercial love story films. *New Life* is a sweet film for today, and while not overly dynamic, it has some moving moments and is certainly a film you would feel comfortable inviting people to view and discussing the themes of life, death and living. While I don't want to outline the ending, I found it quite intriguing for this day and age and have wondered what people's reactions to this will be. Actor Drew Waters directs the film, and the main female character Ava Kennedy is played by Erin Bethea, who will be recognisable to many Christian film watchers, particularly as the lead in an earlier (2008) and very popular faith-based film *Fireproof*. I leave you with the defining narrating comment from the film, by John Patrick Moore, an Australian actor who plays the main male character Ben Morton:

There are mountain top experiences in our journey through this world. Those rare and lucid moments when everything seems right, and anything is possible. There are those ordinary days when we may not be thrillingly aware of what lies in the future, but we know it's still out there. There are also those strange times when things do not add up or make sense, when we seem to be forgotten, when heavens are brass, but it's all the moments, good and bad that make up life, and the most important thing to do with life is to live it.