

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 3 | JUNE 2010

ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Resurrection Hope and the local church

MICHAEL EARL PAGE 6

PLUS SIX PAGES OF LOCAL CHURCH STORIES

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EDITORIAL

Local heroes

In this edition of *ACCatalyst*, Michael Earl from Wesley Mission in Sydney examines why we can have hope—resurrection hope—when things appear bleak and tough. Without giving too much away, Michael finds hope in changed lives of people touched by the good news in his local congregation.

That theme is taken up with an expanded *ACCatalyst* local church

section of reports which feature ACC parishes hard at work.

Evangelising fruit pickers at Merrigum, praise services in North Queensland, and how one local church at St George in Queensland faced the flood all go to show how ACCers are local heroes.

Or just normal Christians being about their master's calling.

John Sandeman

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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catalysteditor@confessingcongregations.com
ACCatalyst is available as a subscription only (\$35pa) or by becoming an ACC Supporting Member (\$35pa concession or \$60pa full)
 Printed by Brougham Press, Scoresby Rd, Bayswater Vic. ISSN 1835 2073

I have discovered the terrible truth about my cat. Rubey is two-timing me. I never thought she would do it, but there you go. Almost daily she disappears off somewhere.

She goes across the road and down the lane but I don't know where she goes from there. If she sees me watching her, she turns around and comes back.

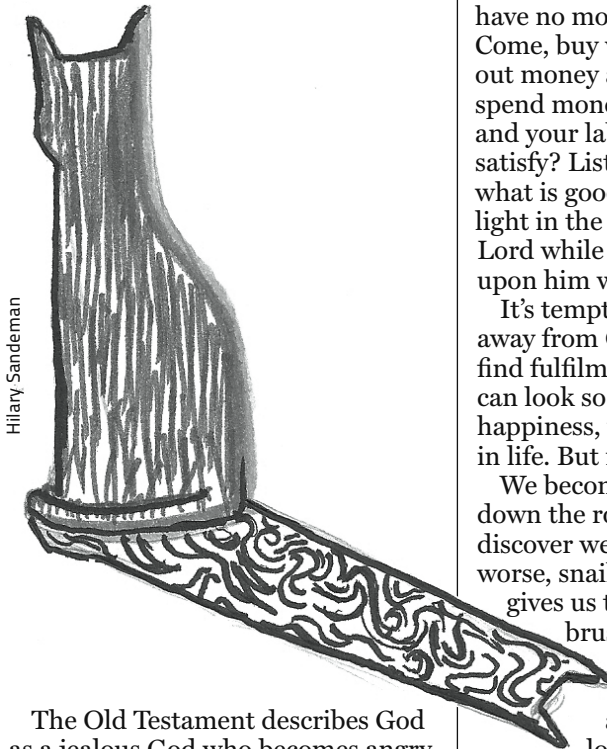
So what is she up to? Is she meeting with other cats? I doubt it, because she has never really thought much of other cats.

Is she looking for rats and mice? It's possible, but I suspect there is something else going on. Rubey is going off somewhere and scrounging food. Somebody is feeding her, and no doubt she goes there meowing hungrily and pretending I don't look after her. Cheeky, ungrateful cat.

But I have to be honest and say that I don't really mind Rubey going off and making friends.

Whoever is feeding her is clearly treating her well and Rubey always comes home again. If someone was giving her poison, or trying to harm her or trap her I would not be so happy and I would do whatever I could to stop her from going there. But if she was determined to sneak off, she would find a way.

Rubey the two timer



The Old Testament describes God as a jealous God who becomes angry when his people chase after idols. God knew that idols could not give life or anything good to the people who went to them.

God is the only true source of the

life that our spirit needs. Isaiah 55 says "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare....seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon him while He is near"

It's tempting at times to walk away from God and think we can find fulfilment elsewhere. The world can look so attractive and promises happiness, fulfilment and purpose in life. But its promises are empty.

We become like a cat sneaking off down the road for a feed, only to discover we are eating sawdust, or worse, snail bait. God is the one who gives us tuna, and fresh water and brushes out our tangles. It is God who forgives our sin and transforms us and gives us purpose and loves us beyond what we are able to comprehend.

And regardless of where we have wandered or how often, God is willing to accept us back!

Robyn



Winner of ACC award: Jiyoung Kim. Wesley Institute photo by John Leung

Pendlebury award win

The winner of a new ACC-sponsored award for students at Wesley Institute is music student Jiyoung Kim. He has received the inaugural Thelma Pendlebury award of \$500. Jiyoung is married with two young children.

“I was born in a Christian family that has been Christians for 4 generations”, says Kim. “Even though I have attended Church since I was really young, my real Christianity started when I was 15. At that time, I met Jesus personally at the Praise and worship Conference.

“It was a gift of God that I could attend Chang Sin High school, which was built by an Australian missionary. At school, I concentrated on doing evangelisation of non-Christian friends during the break.

“I want to be a good music pastor(minister). Thank you so much. God bless You.”

Kim’s award is named in memory of Thelma Pendlebury, whose steadfast faith, generosity of spirit, good humour, and encouragement greatly enriched the members and national councils of ACC and its predecessor bodies as an executive member and

treasurer. Her willingness to take on the treasurer’s role for Reforming Alliance, and then to continue with a very difficult joint role with ACC served us extremely well.

Thelma’s evangelical witness to Christ was transparent. Her unself-conscious humility in serving her Lord was evident in the way in which she discharged her responsibilities as treasurer. Thelma was a long-serving member of Bexley Uniting Church (NSW), and wife of Dr Jim Pendlebury.

Gordon Moyes Award

Jim Pendlebury, Thelma’s husband is involved in raising money for a different Wesley Institute award: the Gordon Moyes Scholarship Gift Fund. This fund raises money from corporations, churches and individuals to finance an annual Theology Scholarship at Wesley Institute for Ministry and the Arts. The Trustees’ desire was to recognise Gordon Moyes’ contribution to Wesley Institute and as an encouragement to aspiring Theol-

ACC chair visits the Hunter region

The ACC Hunter cluster in NSW organised a full programme for the chair during a recent two day visit.

On April 18th, Rev. Dr Max Champion preached at the Sunday morning service at Maitland UC which is the only ACC Congregation in the Hunter Presbytery. He was well received and made good contact with the local members. The minister, Rev. Mark Collins, commented that one member said “perceptive teaching on the importance of the resurrection of the body”.

On Sunday afternoon, Max met with members of the Hunter ACC cluster at Kotara, and presented the Scriptural case for the necessity of the resurrection of our bodies.

On Monday April 19th, Max met with the CEO of the UCA Hunter Presbytery, Rev. Felicity Amery. At lunchtime Max spoke at an ecumenical seminar, including members of the ACC cluster, and several Baptists and a Presbyterian Minister.

(Interestingly the Baptists present at this local gathering acknowledged they’re benefiting from UCA members who had left over previous years). Max presented a good challenge to those present, and encouraged our common Christian fellowship by confessing Christ in times when things may even appear hopeless.

Thanks are especially due to Hunter Cluster convenor, Alton Bowen for all his organisational help, to Glen and Marian Joyce who provided accommodation for Max, to Margaret Lewis for catering and to the local members at Maitland and the ACC Cluster for their hospitality.

ogy students. It proved successful. The most recent recipient is Mr Andrew Jago, who was highly recommended by the WI Theology Department.

“Since its inception, the ‘global meltdown’ reduced the income”, says Jim Pendlebury. “If the Spirit moves you to provide a tax deductible donation to the Gift Fund it should be sent to GMSF Gift Fund, PO Box A270, Sydney South, 1234. It will be gratefully acknowledged.”



PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

Deaths of the innocents

It's best not to be too young or too old. That's the conclusion to be drawn from two recent news items.

A study recently published by the Canadian Medical Association reported on a survey about death involving life-ending drugs in the Flemish area of Belgium, a nation where euthanasia is legal. The study showed that of the 208 deaths 142 were killed with an explicit patient request, and 66 were killed without an explicit patient request.

The study showed that in the majority of cases of euthanasia without consent, the option of euthanasia was not discussed with the person. Most of these patients were over 80 years and were undergoing medical treatment in the hope of being cured of their illness.

The Melbourne *Herald Sun* of May 20 quoted abortion statistics from the 2007 annual report of the Consultative Council on Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity. The article reported that "almost one late-term abortion is performed in Victoria every day, and 54 babies survived the procedure to die postnatally." The paper also reported that of the 345 late-term abortions 160 were done on women with healthy babies and who had said they had social or psychological problems. These figures predate the Victorian Government's legislation on abortion in 2008.

We do not know the details about people involved in all these cases. But surely there is something very worrying about societies in which vulnerable human beings at the beginning

and toward the end of life are at risk of arbitrary death. It is scary that the rights of helpless human beings can be disregarded. It is even more frightening that killing the vulnerable must eventually desensitise our natural aversion to the taking of innocent life.

Diversity and discipline

Among the questions asked of Methodist ordinands before union is one that fails the UCA diversity test. "Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word; and to use both public and private admonitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole, as need shall require, and occasion shall be given?" What a pity that the mandate to teach the truth and rebut 'strange doctrines' is not found in the Uniting Church Ordination Service or the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice!

Episcopal Church and Same-Sex Marriage

A recent study document for the US Episcopal Church House of Bishops addresses the issue of same-sex marriage. The 'conservative group' (four theologians) adheres to what it understands to be the church's traditional ethical and sacramental teaching about marriage. The 'liberal group' (four theologians) revisits this teaching, calling for the church's recognition of faithful, monogamous

same-gender relationships. The preface states 'The work of the theology panel was difficult, but certainly congenial, but there was never a hint from anyone on the panel that we would ever come to one mind on this contentious subject'. Two examples from the (87 page) report:

The conservatives found the opposing arguments 'confused' and their exegesis 'mistaken', notwithstanding their 'quasi-homiletical eloquence'. The liberals concluded that both papers describe faithful patterns of marriage and the church needs both for its witness to the truth. They claim that, rather than undermining marriage, their position upholds, expands and strengthens it.

Both groups claimed to be interpreting scripture faithfully. However, on the issue of the analogy of marriage to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5: 31-2), the liberals claim 'both same and opposite-sex marriage may represent the marriage of Christ and the church, because Christ is the spouse of all believers'. This liberal interpretation disregards the male/female complementarity of Gen 2:24 emphasised throughout by the conservatives.

The authors clearly state they are not offering a compromise position based on the assumption that the two groups can put their disputes behind them and move forward in some kind of consensus. Both claim creedal faithfulness, yet remain in profound disagreement. The key issue raised by these papers is whether same-sex relations are an effect of the fall or a blessing of creation.

More at <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=12313>

It is to be hoped that the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine does not procrastinate in canvassing these issues and producing a doctrine of marriage to recommend to the next Assembly.

Ain't no human bean

Malcolm McLaren (no known relationship to Brian!) died of cancer on 8 April. Manager of the notorious 1970s band the *Sex Pistols*, whose first single was *Anarchy in the UK*, he has been described as punk's 'poster boy of chaos,' a Svengali who courted controversy to maximise his public image. "I am a product of the '60s," he said. "All I have ever felt is disruptive – I don't know any other way." He summed up the key to punk: "Be childish. Be irresponsible. Be disrespectful. Be everything this society hates." (*The Age*, 10 April, p8) If the huge, mainly uncritical, media coverage of his death and contribution to Western culture is indicative, it is clear that self-indulgent nihilism is no barrier to fame and fortune.

It is all very well to be disruptive. After all, Christ's coming caused the greatest disruption in history. Yet, he did not demean our humanity; he redeemed it. This distinction is the point at which Christians should engage with those being harmed by such hedonism.

Death of reason

'Blind Ideology is Dancing on the Grave of Reason' is the title of an article by Melanie Phillips in *The Weekend Australian*, 15-16 May. She claims that "irrational dogma" has displaced reason in the quest for truth, justice and freedom.

The fervour with which minority rights and fashionable causes are now privileged is not matched by logic. "Across a broad range of issues, the progressive intelligentsia appears to have junked the rules of evidence, objectivity and rationality in favour of fantasy, irrationality and upside-down thinking."

"Dissenters from these creeds are socially and professionally ostracised," because it is assumed without argument that their secular ideologies 'offer salvation by a return to righteousness.'

Ironically, these strident ideologues often exhibit the same unthinking fanaticism, dogmatism and intolerance which they detest among "religious"

believers. Their hypocrisy is but a small part of the problem. If the cost of earthly utopia is that reason is buried, then truth, freedom and justice will be based on little more than the will to power. A faith seeking understanding must protest the death of reason.

On the cards

Recently a conference was called in Melbourne to discuss future relationships between Uniting Church congregations and UnitingCare Agencies. The facilitators began by asking conference participants to respond to a series of picture cards. These would set the direction of discussions.

The pictures, which featured natural objects like a country lane and machinery, could have been used at any secular conference. As Christian art has a long history which manifests many styles, and as it was a Uniting Church event, it is reasonable to presume that the Christian

Courteous



Responsible



Loving



Forgiving



Strengths cards

artistic tradition would have been fertile ground for reflection on the Church's mission. Of course, this was not the case. If participants had been presented with cards showing, say, an icon of the Holy Trinity or a Rembrandt painting of the Prodigal Son, then reflections would have been firmly directed to, and perhaps shaped by, the reality of God's redemptive love. This approach, however, probably would have offended those who believe that the principle of "theological diversity" should exclude such specifically Christian representations. Contributors include Ross Carter and Rosalie Hudson

IAN CLARKSON

Guard the treasure

Put simply, we in the West, are in danger of destroying the core values that have produced the kind of unique open, free community, in fact the very society which has given us the unique freedoms to question those root beliefs.

And its non-Christian commentators like Melanie Phillips, a Jew, and even atheists who are warning us, like Germany's Jurgen Habermas, who stated "Christianity and nothing else is the ultimate foundation of liberty, conscience, human rights and democracy. It doesn't impair cross cultural understanding but in fact makes it possible."

We should not be coy about confronting these facts, because countries which enjoy and practise the fairest judicial systems, which have properly functioning, democratically controlled police and military, which have the most settled multi cultural societies, and are the best examples of free, peaceful, ordered societies on the planet, are those countries where the teachings of Christ and the influence of Chris-

tian culture, is the most dominant. That's why countries like ours are the most desired by immigrants and refugees.

And this is our problem. Pluralist philosophy which is now dominant in Western societies by claiming that every belief and life style is of equal value, regards that which gave it birth and nourished it, to be no longer legitimate.

This Christophobia needs careful but direct challenge not only for the sake of our souls, but also for the sake of sustaining what is best in our western societies.

This means for example ensuring our new national schools history curriculum gives accurate and proper place to the influence of the Bible in the formation of our nation.

Let us enjoy, celebrate and be thankful for the fruits of past generations of Christian thinkers, leaders and martyrs, and not just indulge our freedoms, but use them as weapons and opportunities to strengthen the root of what we have and guard our treasure before it is too late.

Resurrection

Gospel Hope in Daily Ministry by MICHAEL EARL

A number of years ago a minister of a different Wesley church told me the story of one particular Easter Sunday. Perhaps like many other Wesley churches, this one had within the worship space a picture of John Wesley, the one most of us are familiar with; Wesley in his black gown and clerical collar staring back with a fixed and brooding glare at anyone who dared to look at him. Far from being placed in a respectful, yet inconspicuous position, the picture hung imposingly behind the pulpit. So every time the minister preached he had John Wesley literally looking over his shoulder. No pressure.

On this Easter Sunday, believing that the focus should be elsewhere, and reasoning that the great man himself would surely have deferred, the minister took the picture down. So that day there was both an empty tomb and an empty wall. He then went on to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus in full voice. What do you think was the thing he received most comments about following on from the service?

St Paul makes it plain for us in 1 Corinthians 15, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." (1 Cor. 15:14). In Athens on Mars Hill it is Paul's preaching of the resurrection that is the lightning rod which invokes the impassioned responses. "*When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject.' At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed.*" (Acts 17:32-34).

Just imagine the minister in my initial example greeting people at the door having left it all in the pulpit on Easter Day, wanting those there to take away the joy and hope of the risen Christ with them back into their daily life, only to be confronted with, "When are you going to put the picture back?" Or perhaps in my own experience at one of my placement churches during training where, having preached the morning sermon, I was met by a retired minister—always a slightly apprehensive moment for the young and impassioned—and was left with this little gem, "Thanks for that Michael. It reminded me of some of my early sermons, gee they were pathetic." Point taken.

As you reflect on your own experiences in various ministries whether they be in youth groups, in pastoral care roles, in administration, or as an ordained minister, no doubt you have your own catalogue, those times when in big ways or small you've been left wondering, what am I really doing here?

What's more, any person in Christian leadership is constantly confronted by the brokenness and fractured nature of their own lives. Like St Paul, we too may find ourselves reflecting, "*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do...*" (Romans 7: 15 & 19). Confession is our constant calling.

In one of the congregations I work in we have a number of homeless people who come in each service

to sit in the comfortable chairs and enjoy the warmth and protected environment. It is one of the great things about a place like Wesley Mission that people really struggling with life still find it a refuge in a variety of ways. What this can mean is that at various points in the service long and loud snoring can be heard for periods of time, sometimes loud and long enough for the whole congregation to hear. While it's wonderful that such folk can find a peaceful place for some rest, in one sense this is everything the church is for, I hope this posture is not a metaphor for the congregational vitality of all UCA congregations.

Lack of numbers, lack of passion, lack of grace and kindness among people. Long and dry church council meetings, petty feuds, bickering and power plays. Moribund sermons, uninspiring worship, biblical illiteracy. Traditionalism, over-bearing nostalgia, reluctance to try new things. More interest in buildings than people, in money than mission, in personal priorities than pastoral care. It's a long list.

If, as the UCA Basis Of Union suggests, "*The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ.*" (Paragraph 15 (a)), then it should be the driving force of all that the church purports to be, yet so often we fail in this task.

Moving to the wider church within the UCA, things don't seem to get much better. The wider-church processes can sometimes be the most frustrating to engage with. And however we look at it, I think there can be no denying that almost from its inception the UCA has been over-governed, a fact that has only served to create a sometimes unconquerable gulf between people in the pews and wider-church leaders and processes. In recent times, as we are all aware, this chicken came home to roost most powerfully and destructively in the debate over sexuality.

It's not difficult to become disheartened and deflated at the reality of much of this, especially as we consider that the broader context into which we proclaim the resurrection of Jesus is becoming better and better at discovering ways not to listen. I don't know about you, but there's just about nothing I find more frustrating than when Christian references are used for non-Christian means.

To briefly give you three:

1) (very relevant to our topic) The Easter football games that are advertised on TV using the resurrection motif "—remember when [insert your team name here] came back from the dead to take a famous victory."

2) In a magazine a few years ago when a cooking article used the Lord's Prayer as a foundation for extolling the righteousness of particular foods – along the lines of give us today our high-in-fibre, multi-grain bread.

3) In a car magazine I was reading recently a headline extolling the virtues of cubic capacity and horsepower output of boat engines, "Water into Whine".

Much of the wider Australian society simply looks past Christianity now. Churches are seen as relics of a bygone era, totally irrelevant to the real needs of people's lives,

Religion

useful for weddings and funerals, but not much more, and once disused for lack of attendance turned into coffee or craft shops. Just this last week I was leading a devotion on one of our camps for disadvantaged children and I was asking them what they thought a minister does. One little girl shot up her hand and said, "Christens, marries and divorces people." I reverted to the Meatloaf speculation that 2 out of 3 ain't bad.

Connect this kind of mission field to an already distracted and internally conflicted church, and it seems the prospects for the hope of the risen Lord to be incorporated and appropriated into lives and communities is slim.

Yet, marvellously, amazingly, it happens. God works often in spite of who we are, and through his power ministry does make a difference. The world does change. The new creation that Paul so boldly declared to be the result of Christ's living in us (2 Cor. 5: 17) is a potent reality not a theological nicety. I know this because I've seen it.

We have a man in our evening congregation whom I often take home after the service because he lives literally only 3 minutes from where I do. His name is Francis. Brought up with a nominally Catholic faith, the moorings to his spiritual tradition became more and more frayed and weakened over time. Estranged from much of his family and now into his 70s he has been dealing with the effects of Parkinson's disease for some years. The disease has hunched him over so badly that his whole body stands almost at a complete right angle from the waist. Walking is a serious challenge and is accomplished with a walker frame which acts as both a rest and a guide for him.

Quite apart from the physical issues, his posture and obvious bodily contortion have meant that his self esteem and confidence have been taken down to levels which seriously affected his outlook on life and relationships. Through one of our chaplains, who has been with him and sat with him and talked to him for many, many hours, at a point where he felt comfortable, he agreed to come to church.

Last year in May, after attending with the chaplain over a number of weeks and months, and at his own request we held a service in which he came forward, knelt at the prayer desk and affirmed his faith in Jesus Christ. Although I had sat with him and gone through the questions the Superintendent of Wesley Mission would ask and although I had reassured him over and over that he was loved and cherished by all who would be there, he was still concerned that he would not know what to say. He was concerned he would shake so uncontrollably that he simply wouldn't be able to get any words out at all. As he knelt and responded, his voice started to waver. It became more and more broken and faint.

As this continued, another man, a regular member of the congregation, a man whom our Superintendent had made a deal with that if he could stay sober for a whole

year he would interview him on television, which he did, stepped forward onto the platform and placed his hand on Francis' shoulder. It was the very picture of all the Christian gospel is about.

Today he is as frail as ever, and yet now he describes himself as a powerful man, a man of Jesus' power. For it is no longer he who lives but Christ who lives in him. (Gal 2: 20) And God's power is made perfect in his weakness. (2 Cor 12: 9) He walks around quite comfortably and happily in public on his own. He smiles more. He speaks to people more. And he knows a trust in God that holds him firm in a way that previously has seemed impossible.

There is certainly an objective aspect to the resurrection, it is an event in history, an event through which God breaks open all history, an event of cosmic significance that finally and fully puts down the powers of sin and death; and there is certainly also a subjective side, where the power that raised Christ from the dead flows into hearts and minds and transforms people like you and me and Francis. It is when the objective and the subjective meet in the daily reality of ministry that the church has dynamite in its hands in a world which prefers to look in any other direction for its big bangs – money, status, greed, influence, particular ideologies, sex etc.

It can be very easy in a church like the UCA to become distracted by the frustrations that sometimes feel as though they engulf our existence; to become deflated and to feel like the cause is lost and hopeless. But I think that when we look closely enough we can see that glimpses of hope do emerge. There are good men and women of the gospel working away at every level of the church to bring about a better world. The three Presbytery Ministers I have most to do with are good examples of people within the system who haven't lost their theological and mission-al teeth. Each in their own way, with their own gifts and personalities, wants to see the church live up to its calling to be the witness for hope in the world it is meant to be.

I'm not sure how many times Charles Wesley's great hymn, *Christ the Lord is Risen Today* would have been sung on Easter Day in churches around Australia, I'm guessing quite a few. I had it twice! But it still speaks of all we are as Christian people. Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia. I think Charles would surely have agreed with the minister taking down the picture of his brother John on Easter Day. I'm sure he would have said, there is only one point of focus today and it begins with the words, "I know that my redeemer lives."

So it is for us. We are a resurrection people who exist in the ongoing power of the presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit, to the Glory of God the Father. This is who we are, this is what we proclaim, this is how we hope, this is what makes us new.

Rev Michael Earl ministers to the Wesley Chapel in the City Congregation in Sydney. His talk has been edited.

CONFESSING MOVEMENT

Anglican Communion crisis is now over

The African and Asian majority of the Anglican Communion met in Singapore as the "Global South" in April and decided that they would become more independent of the liberal parts of the Communion.

The election of a second gay bishop Mary Glasspool by the diocese of Los Angeles in March had made it clear that a moratorium on further gay bishops in the USA was over.

The moratorium had been requested by the Communion's "Windsor Report" in 2004 following the election of Bishop Gene Robinson.

The Global South called for their

op, according to Peter Jensen. He suggests that the crisis is long over in the Anglican Communion and a new stability has arrived with many Global South provinces having given up on the US and Canadian churches and regarding themselves out of communion with them.

"If I am correct, that we now belong to the post-crisis phase, we need to know what such a moment requires. Action in this phase is no less demanding. One thing is for sure: those who wait and do nothing will be playing into the hands of ideologues who have had such

a triumph in the west. This is especially so for the orthodox in those churches in the west which have yet to come into their moment of truth."

Jensen's analysis has been accepted by the influential blogger Mark Harris (who is a member of the Episcopal Church's Executive

Council. After quoting from Jensen's piece Harris concludes "The Anglican Communion is broken. The crisis has not been averted ... The failure to communicate across cultural, social and theological boundaries is too great for the moment. ... The Anglican Communion as we know it is no longer." <http://anglicanfuture.blogspot.com/2010/04/new-anglican-maps-anglican-communion.html>

Harris goes so far as to draw a map of the Confessing Anglican World. It contains areas where the churches are confessing churches (dark); Mission areas with strong confessing groups (medium gray); and hostile territory where new confessing churches are needed (middle shade of gray).

From the ACC point of view it is possible to imagine similar maps for Presbyterian, Methodist and Lutheran confessing worlds. But what shade of grey is Australia?

Presbyterian split

About 100 churches have left the Presbyterian Church (USA) for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, increasing the smaller group by about half. The departures have occurred since 2006.

Evangelical churches in PCUSA formed a group called The New Wineskins Initiative in 2003 which grew rapidly. But in 2006 New Wineskins formed a team to develop resources that might help churches leave the PCUSA.

Informal conversations between the EPC and the New Wineskins group took place about this time. Faced with the prospect of a large number of churches applying to join it, in 2007 the EPC formed a special "transitory presbytery" for the transferring churches to join to join.

It was possibly provocative for the EPC to call it the New Wineskins Transitional Presbytery.

An official PCUSA report describes it this way: "The creation of an ecclesial body within the EPC whose very purpose and name seemed to aim at absorbing PC(USA) New Wineskins congregations and pastors created a chilling in the relationship between the two denominations."

Churches leaving the PCUSA for EPC could

- negotiate with the presbytery,
- negotiate with the presbytery, but also use civil legal process, or
- just walk away

The PCUSA report suggest that "In some cases, departing congregations relying on a legal strategy alone or in concert with an ecclesiastical one, lost additional money or property, and would have been much better off without civil action.

"Situations that involved a higher degree of trust and communication usually resulted in a negotiated settlement with which all parties could live and still feel respect for one another. Some of these situations even seemed to result in what was perceived by many as a "grace-filled" process."

The PCUSA investigation also noted "There was no evidence that the EPC took the initiative in entering PC(USA) congregations to speak against the PC(USA), for the EPC, or about affiliation with the EPC."



Mark Harris' map

own "Primates' Council", a "General assembly" every three years and for the emerging world provinces to be financially independent of the west.

The 20 Global South provinces account for at least 40 million of the 60 million members of the Anglican communion.

The confessing groups from the The Episcopal Church (TEC) in the United States includes the "Communion Partners" (similar to ACC) and the Anglican Church of North America (a union of groups that have left TEC). The Global South declared itself "partners in the Gospel" with ACNA and assured Communion Partners of their "loving prayers and support".

Australia was represented by Archbishop Peter Jensen and Robert Tong from Sydney and Archbishop Jeffrey Driver from Adelaide.

The Global South Meeting was not a response to a crisis brought on by the election of a second gay Bishop

UCA PREAMBLE

Why we said 'No'

MAX CHAMPION and ROSS CARTER put the case against the new UCA preamble to their presbytery Port Phillip East

▪ The Covenanting Statement at the 1994 Assembly is a necessary and sufficient basis for a strong continuing relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous members of the UCA.

It is grounded in our unity in Christ which was celebrated in a service of Holy Communion.

The opening paragraph, which was omitted in the reading of the Covenanting Statement at the Twelfth Assembly in 2009, reads:

'We meet in the presence of God who through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God and to one another in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our unity "transcends cultural, economic, national and racial boundaries"; (Basis of Union, paragraph 2). In this sharing of bread and wine we recall God's gracious covenant with us and the whole creation, and anticipate the joyful celebration of the fulfilment of God's rule of love and justice among us. In the meantime, as people who share in this covenant, we are called to carry out faithfully Christ's command to love one another and to order our life in the church in truth and justice. We who are not aboriginal members of the Seventh Assembly, representing all members of the Church, make this covenanting statement.'

Before a new Preamble is approved significant changes must be made.

Otherwise, it will not contribute to the unity which it seeks to express and realise in the Church.

1. Statements about Christ, the Trinity and the Spirit must be made clearer.

As it stands, the significance of Christ is more or less reduced to the ideas of 'grace and love.' If God has revealed Himself in the indigenous culture then it is hard to see what role Christ has, except to confirm what is already known.

Moreover, the relations between the persons of the trinity are ignored and the richness of Christology, as affirmed and explicated at length in the ecumenical creeds, is lacking. These failings seriously distort the Church's affirmation of the creative and reconciling love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for all peoples.

Therefore paragraph 3.3 of the new preamble must be re-written.

2. The Language of 'First Peoples' and 'Second Peoples' must be rethought.

a. As Michael Owen, former Principal of the Theological College in WA says,

"The proposed new preamble wants to make the "First People" into a new Israel, through whom God deals in a unique way to constitute an especially Australian

church. It would make the Uniting church similar to the British Israelites, the Mormons and the "German-Christians" of the 1930's, *all of whom wanted to find for their respective nations special connections to God through secret historic links or extra-biblical revelations or creation-based expressions of God's will in and for the national ethos and destiny.'*

As the new preamble assumes that indigenous spirituality is a new source of revelation, more theological

It is implied that in Australia indigenous people take the place of the Hebrews

work is necessary before it is approved.

b. The anthropological use of 'First' and 'Second' peoples in the preamble does not conform to the language of the Gospel. 'Are we not one people in Christ who worship the triune God?' The church confesses that 'in Christ,' there is neither Jew nor

Greek ... (Gal 3:28), neither Barbarian nor Scythian ... (Col 3:11).

c. There is serious confusion and a distinct lack of clarity about two significant historic relationships: Christianity and Israel and Christianity and indigenous people. Thus, crucial questions are unresolved:

• It is implied that, in Australia, indigenous people take the place of the Hebrews as the suffering people who prepare the way of Christ. This is an extraordinary state of affairs for a church which rightly protests the denigration of Jewish people.

If this is not the intention, the preamble must explain how its language about 'First' and 'Second' peoples relates to the church's understanding of the Jews (as the 'first people' of the covenant) called by God to be a 'light to the nations' (the 'second people' of the covenant) in Christ.

It should be made plain that, in the unity of the twofold biblical covenant, Western Christians and indigenous Christians both belong to 'the second peoples.' As such, they are both judged and redeemed in Christ – a point lost in the rush to attribute special spiritual insight to indigenous people and to blame colonising Christians alone for not practising what they preach.

Therefore, the preamble must clarify the theological relationship between its language of 'First' and 'Second' peoples to describe the historic settlement of Australia in the context of the church's confession of God's purposes in the twofold covenant with humankind through the Jews and Jesus Christ.

• The relationship between indigenous law-and-custom

Continued next page

GEN X

It's all grace

PETER CHAPMAN rewrites a catchcry of the young

Among the Gen X & Y hipsters of today, it is common to hear people say: "It's all good!" It's a sort of catch-all that has taken the place of "No worries" or "She'll be right." Indeed, I've used "It's all good" myself on many an occasion to communicate to someone that everything is under control, or that things are looking up. However, I have found another similar catchcry to be even more useful as a follower of Jesus: "It's all grace!" "It's all grace" has proven to be even more useful than "It's all good". "It's all grace" communicates to those around me the simple yet powerful message of Jesus that drives, directs and sustains me.

Grace is God's undeserved love and forgiveness towards us, and it's at the heart of the Christian faith. It is what sets 'the way' apart from all other faiths of the world. It's radically subversive, and it breaks down all sorts of barriers.

Whilst at college being 'formed' for ministry, without doubt some of the most beneficial times were those spent with real-life practitioners who were already out on the coal-face. We would discuss potential (or real) pastoral issues that might pop up when we were eventually out in the messy world of congregational ministry. "It's all grace" is one of the 'take home' messages that has stuck with me from those interactions. It has come in handy in all manner of ministry situations that I have found myself in.



New Orleans 2007

dingler1109

The context of the original discussion was around the role of the sacraments, which at their core, are a celebration of God's grace to us. "It's all grace" was Chris Udy's response to the issue at hand, and I have adopted this philosophy when it comes to dealing with some less-than-gracious people outside the church (and some within it).

In everyday terms, it basically means I try to err on the side of grace when

interacting with the Aussie public - much of which is quite ignorant about this key plank of the Christian theology. Unfortunately, many assume I might condemn them for failing to live up to a Godly standard in some aspect of their lives. It means that when a couple come to me asking me to marry them and it becomes apparent they are already living together (which almost all of them are), I don't make a big song and dance about it. It means that when a couple come to me wanting their child baptised but fail to grasp even the most basic of Christian concepts, I don't belittle them for their ignorance. It means that when a grieving family call on me to conduct a funeral I don't point out the hypocrisy of their request given their lack of involvement in the church.

Even when relating to those people who are already followers of Jesus (and are therefore expected to be working towards being perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect), the "It's all grace" principle will still come in handy on a regular basis.

On many occasions, things will certainly not be all good. But with Jesus, "It's all grace", and for my own sake, I'm glad that's the case.

Why we said no *From page 9*

and Judeo-Christian law needs deeper elaboration. Resolution of the following issues is vital if the preamble is to achieve its aims: the relation between grace and righteousness, gospel and law, justification and justice, cultural laws and the law of Christ. In its present form 'law' is used imprecisely to convey, perhaps unwittingly, the false impression that distinct forms of law are more or less the same.

3. There has been undue haste in presenting, referring and determining this vital matter.

In late 2008 and early 2009 some Synods and Presbyteries had the opportunity to comment on a proposal which was very different from the one that was finalised only one week before the Assembly. A decision to replace, rather than to amend the original preamble, is of such major significance that it requires more careful consideration by all the Councils of the church over a longer period of time.

4. Conclusion:

In its present form the preamble will not contribute

to the truth and unity that it seeks to achieve. Without a clear and concise articulation of the triune faith of the Church, centred on Jesus Christ as the one who fulfils Israel's covenant to be 'a light to the nations,' the preamble will cause distress to many indigenous and non-indigenous members of the UCA and be a source of contention within the councils of the church and with our ecumenical partners.

Max Champion and Ross Carter 23 April 2010

Canberra capers

National Chair of ACC, Rev Dr Max Champion has accepted an invitation issued to 200 Church leaders to take part in 2010 Make it Count at Old Parliament House in Canberra. The event will be addressed by the PM Mr Rudd and the Leader of the Opposition Mr Abbott on matters of importance to Christian communities. As at the last Federal election, it will be webcast to about 100,000 people throughout Australia.

Emergent insight and confusion

A Review of Brian McLaren's *A New Kind of Christian* by Mark Dever. McLaren has emerged as a major figurehead in the emergent church movement—but is he a friend to evangelicalism?

A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey, Brian D McLaren, Jossey-Bass. Mark Dever is senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC. He heads the influential blog Nine Marks - www.9marks.org

Let me come clean at the outset of this review. I picked up this book with some wariness, assuming that I would be a critical friend of its perspective. After finishing the book and reflecting on it, I would call myself more of a friendly critic, finding it less helpful than I would have hoped, and more dangerous than I would have thought.

This book is an account of a journey out of that kind of reactionary conservatism that acts as if it is already in possession of all answers to all questions—as if omniscience were one of God's communicable attributes. The way McLaren has chosen to write his suggestive critique is in the form of a fictional dialogue between two characters—Dan Poole, a tired and middle-aged pastor, weary of external trials and internal questions, and Neil Edward Oliver, a high school teacher (and former pastor) and Pastor Dan's own Sherpa guide into the inviting wilds of postmodernity. This second character is called—acronymically—“NEO” throughout. This well prepares the reader for the subtlety which marks the book.

Certainly truth can come in the garb of fiction. This is no new insight of our narrative-loving age. From the brief parables of Jesus to Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly*, and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, works of fiction have long been understood to be appropriate vehicles for bringing uncomfortable facts to light. Behind the masks of characters, we may entertain and empathize, criticize and consider ideas which, had they appeared straightforwardly, we would quickly dismiss or wrongly defend. But art not only reveals; it also conceals.

Throughout the book, there are many flashes of wisdom that reveal the author's pastoral experience. The pastorate is difficult. Lack of success does lead to a willingness to change. Those who have a “believe the worst” suspicion are distracting and debilitating. It is hugely

important to work with young people. But this book was not written about any of these topics. Nor was it written to simply bring the reader to engage empathetically with the characters. It was written to change the mind of the reader.

Certainly all Christians must recognize the importance—even necessity—of change. Apart from embracing change, we Christians have no salvation. The churches of the reformation have at their core an understanding of the need for always being reformed according to the Word of God.

This isn't to say, of course, that all changes are good. Until fairly recently (let's say, until the Enlightenment) in the West, change was taken as almost equivalent to decay. Though this is hard for us to believe in our day of progress and assumption of advancement, “novelty”

The way the adjectives “premodern” and “medieval” are thrown around throughout this book are distorting

was for a long time a pejorative term. The great historical changes that were in the foreground of our Protestant parents' thinking were the fall of Adam from the garden, and the apostasy of the Church from the gospel.

With such changes in mind, the Protestant reformation was a conservative revolution. Its attempt was not a realization of a new vision but the recovery of a lost one. In that sense, there is something in the genes of Protestantism that is conservative—wanting to keep—even recover—the good. Even the New Testament itself was a set of revolutionary writings only in

the most conservative way. The New Testament documents, from the earliest epistle to the latest gospel, were written not to augment, but to confirm and assure the faithful continuance of the message of the gospel to the rising generations.

McLaren mentions how Martin Luther felt (p xii),

presenting Luther's need to break through to a new paradigm as akin to the situation Christians today face. Yet while Martin Luther certainly did grieve over what he saw happening with Tetzel and indulgences, he was fundamentally motivated by a positive certainty as a result of his biblical studies—that our justification is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It was this positive assertion that was at the heart of the Protestant paradigm shift, nothing less.

Iwish another character had been introduced who was a thoughtful, confessing evangelical. He or she could have asked such questions as “What things may we be certain of without being smug?” “Is categorizing ever good? Can categories ever bring accurate clarity, and even free us?”

Well, since I'm writing this review, perhaps I can serve the role of this third character. Let me ask four basic questions.

Is McLaren seeing a real problem? Yes.

Has McLaren rightly described the problem? In some significant places he has, though one does have to put up with a good bit of hectoring in order to read the descriptions. So, for example, on page 23, proponents of the idea that God does not know the future “suggest new interpretations” while proponents of the idea that God does are “traditionalists” who “cry ‘heresy’”.

Here are four examples of some of the problems which McLaren has rightly noted:

1. The evident lack of transformation in the lives of many evangelicals (e.g., p xiv).
2. The meanness of fundamentalists (e.g., p 9).
3. The shallowness of much that passes for evangelism, whether through coercion or intimidation (p 62). The mass-marketing of conversions and the ubiquity of the unbiblical phrase “accepting Christ as your personal saviour” (p 105). The distorted counting of conversions (pp 108-109).
4. The privatization and wrong individualism which have come to characterize vast tracts of American evangelicalism. McLaren's concerns about systemic injustices are healthy, and are appropriate concerns for Christians to have (pp 100-101). So, too, are his concerns about the importance of generosity in an age of affluence (p 112).

In all of these areas, among others, McLaren raises good (though not novel) concerns.

But has McLaren rightly traced the causes of said problems? Here I am less certain. Much of McLaren's analysis is composed of stereotype. It is simplistic. Let me give a few specific examples.

1. To regard fundamentalism as the problem, when McLaren can easily attach the label to either conservative or liberal (as Neo does on p 9), shows a more shallow understanding than the reality we face requires. The problem with the terrorist hijackers of September 11, was not that they were simply fundamentalists, but that the fundamental ideas they held to so certainly were themselves tragically wrong.

2. History is distorted. Postmodernists often write of “tyrannizing metanarratives” that is, sweeping explanations of history and reality that twist facts in order to justify their own coherence. But surely the way the adjectives “premodern” and “medieval” are thrown around throughout this book (e.g., on pp 42-43) are themselves distorting. (an ironic problem for a teaching that suggests that “At its worst, this book posits a new, simplistic dualism which will result in the exact opposite of what

its author desires—a reducing of everything to either modern (and therefore to be dismissed) or otherwise (pre- or post-) and therefore to be carefully considered. The book abounds with dichotomies between the bad old and the good new (e.g., pp 29-31). Dispensationalism, Calvinism, charismaticism, and mainstream evangelicalism are all dismissed, it seems, fundamentally simply because of their age (pp xiv-xv).

3. He divides what should be joined and joins what should be divided. Dichotomies that pit goods against each other don't solve the problem, rather they're part of it, (e.g., p 130). Why not care about being saved from Hell and sin, about getting into Heaven and being good, about having our sins forgiven and being good neighbours?

On the other hand, McLaren sometimes seems to delight in reconciling opposites, showing that there opposition is only apparent, only due to our modern perspective. But, to regard evangelicalism, or Protestantism as merely one “tribe” or one “wing of the church” (e.g., p xvii) is to dismiss the truths rediscovered at the Reformation at a stroke (though I assume that McLaren would in no way wish to do that).

But again, on page 41, Neo suggests that the distinction between liberal and evangelical is about to become “inconsequential.” I can hardly think of a more consequential distinction, if we're to have any ground to be authentically self-critical, than to have a reliable word from our Creator.

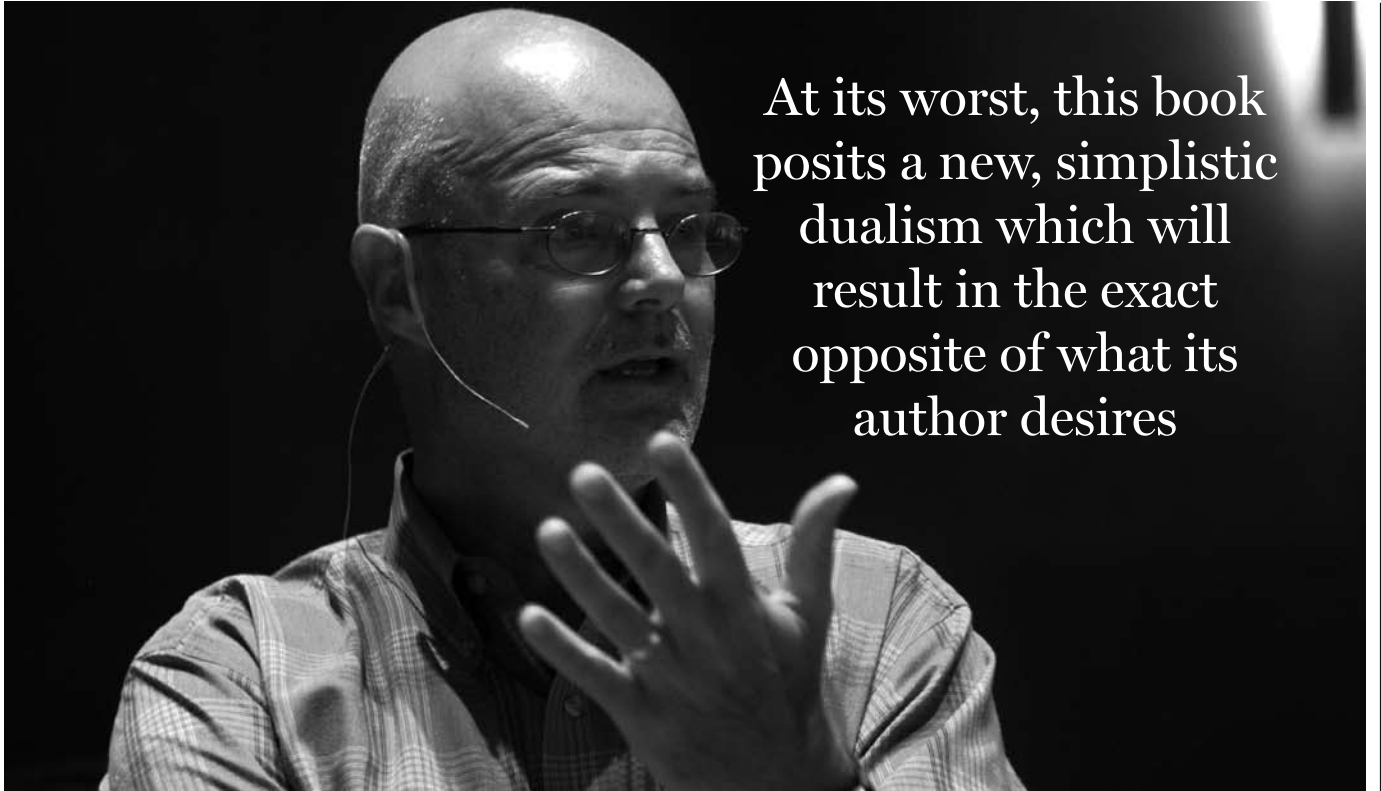
4. The book's presentation of other religions is inaccurate. Presenting Christianity as having similar problems to Islam when it comes to conversion by the sword and violence (as he does on pp 62-63) sounds better the less you know about it. A Christian understanding of human nature leaves conversion forever beyond the work of what any coercion—physical or otherwise—can accomplish; whereas in Islam, physical force can quite appropriately (in a theological sense) be used to bring someone's will sufficiently into submission.

Has McLaren rightly pointed the way forward? I am less certain still.

1. On the good side, McLaren calls us to self-examination, and though he is mistaken in seeming to assume that criticizing “your own modern viewpoint” is something new, the call to self-criticism is both biblical and difficult (p 35; cf. II Cor. 13:5).

2. The call for nuance in understanding the Bible is welcome, but should have been better practised by McLaren himself. The objections that Neo makes on page 49 to the evangelicals' selectively literal reading of the Bible finds no answer in the book. Yet even an elementary reading of Christian theology shows that since the New Testament Christians have always understood that God has worked variously in different times, and that salvation history has a time for the nation Israel, a time for the Babylonian Exile, a time for the Messiah's coming and crucifixion, the Spirit's out-pouring, and Christ's return. All of these are unique events, and all of them are significant for how we understand “difficult” passages.

3. The Bible itself must be understood to be the judge of any of our traditions, our reasoning, or our interpretations of all spiritual experiences. Any lessening of this will simply lead us away from God. Though Neo prefers the image of a spider web over a building with a foundation to explain how the faith is anchored, the image of the building with the one foundation is the biblical image (cf. Eph. 2:20).



At its worst, this book posits a new, simplistic dualism which will result in the exact opposite of what its author desires

Brian McLaren May 1, 2010

theexileinny

4. McLaren suggests that what Jesus was really about was a holistic reconciliation of God with the whole created order. But if that assertion serves to de-centre the cross and the preaching of the gospel, then we would be immeasurably impoverished by following it.

5. McLaren's concern for a wrong focusing on the objective by evangelicals has perhaps led him into the opposite error. So hell is considered fundamentally in terms of the experience of the condemned (91). Such a re-focusing is presumed to be more bearable by us. But is there to be no consideration for God, or for why He might choose to punish some eternally, or for what He has revealed about this in His Word? Biblical language about Hell, it is suggested, is evocative, not "technical," (p 95). But why pit the two against each other? And why is theology only presented as "how people have sought" God, rather than as about God's revelation of Himself (p 161)?

6. McLaren's book—strangely—seems to ignore—or at least underestimate—the constructive role of the local congregation. So Neo tells Dan that those things that had made him "more identified and isolated as a member of a religious sub-culture" had not served him well in the long run (pp 116-117). Yet swimming with dolphins and going to soccer games with non-Christian friends, as good as those activities may be at showing God's reconciling work, fall far short of the picture the local, gathered congregation is to present. Could the privatization that McLaren rightly cautions us about really find its answer not so much in community service and understanding systemic evil, but primarily and most deeply and transformingly by covenanting before God with a certain set of believers to love and serve?

In the last chapter of the book, Neo gives a new idea for what we need perhaps even more than seminaries—"a lifelong learning community, perhaps like the Catholic orders, that one joins—for life," (pp 162-163). Again, I was stunned here at the mixture of insight and confusion, of beginning to see an important problem which is

invisible to so many, and yet at the same time completely ignoring the remedy God has given us. Of course Neo is right that seminaries don't make pastors; under God, churches do. This is the lifelong community of learning that pastors—and all Christians—are to belong to. Why the persistent absence throughout this book of any substantial positive understanding of the local church? Will this offering help the average evangelical pastor who has known the church far too much as audience, and too little as congregation?

In conclusion, in the name of postmodernism, McLaren has ironically undertaken the most Enlightenment of tasks—the Kantian separating of the noumenal (the essence) from the phenomenal (the apparent). One could hardly imagine a more Empirical, dare we say modern, undertaking. In his introduction, McLaren charitably assumes of his readers "basic sincerity, goodwill, intelligence, and desire to become a better person and help create a better world," (p xvii). This reviewer at least intends to share all of those laudable characteristics with the author. One appreciates McLaren's good intentions, his own decades of pastoring and his care for countless people. In this book, McLaren has again attempted to serve the church by raising important questions.

McLaren also says that he hopes for every reader that "you will feel you have made real progress when you turn the last page," (p xviii). Sadly, I have to say that reading this book has not helped me make real progress. I had already encountered the useful ideas in this book elsewhere. Many others are simplistic, or just plain false. I trust that both the author and the reviewer can sleep well at night knowing that the church of Christ can survive both bad books and bad reviews. Perhaps in this case, it will have to survive both.

This review was previously published in Books and Culture. Brian McLaren toured Australia in early 2010

Destroying Marriage

BILL MUEHLENBERG on a not so secret agenda

The oxymoronic attempt to legalise same-sex marriage is a recipe for disaster. But don't take my word for it. Indeed, don't listen to anyone on this issue but the homosexual militants themselves. They are the ones who are proudly proclaiming how they will destroy marriage if they get their way.

The truth is, for all the talk about same-sex marriage, few homosexuals actually have in mind the same thing that heterosexuals have in mind. Most seek to radically expand and alter the common understanding of marriage. Long-term monogamous fidelity is seldom part of this new understanding.

Simply reading through the homosexual press this becomes clear. Many seem to want to have their cake and eat it too. Article titles such as "How to Stay Married and Still Be a Slut" are not all that uncommon. Many homosexuals happily admit that traditional heterosexual marriage constraints are not exactly their cup of tea.

One homosexual writer for example, Andrew Sullivan, writes that if homosexual marriage contracts come into force, they would have to be "different": that is, they would have to allow for "extra-marital outlets" and other major changes. Of course that undermines the very essence of marriage, which is the covenant of life-long sexual faithfulness.

It is worth quoting Sullivan further here. He speaks about the "foibles of a simple heterosexual model" for homosexual relationships. And then he makes this telling admission:

"I believe strongly that marriage should be made available to everyone, in a politics of strict public neutrality. But within this model, there is plenty of scope for cultural difference. There is something baleful about the attempt of some gay conservatives to educate homosexuals and lesbians into an uncritical acceptance of a stifling model of heterosexual normality. The truth is, homosexuals are not entirely normal; and to flatten their varied and complicated lives into a single, moralistic model is to miss what is essential and exhilarating about their otherness."

Elizabeth Kristol offers some trenchant commentary on this: "Stifling? Moralistic? These are strange epithets to come upon in the final pages of a book whose goal is to convince readers that homosexuals want to marry and deserve to marry; that homosexual love is as dignified as heterosexual love; that it is inhumane not to allow the dignity of this love to find fruition in marriage; that marriage is so venerable an institution that it is single-handedly capable of leading men out of lives of empty promis-

cuity into unions of commitment and fidelity. Suddenly we learn, almost as an afterthought, that the institution of marriage may have to change to accommodate the special needs of homosexuals."

Same-sex marriage proponent Richard Mohr openly affirms the importance of "flexibility" in same-sex unions. He is unashamed in saying this: "Monogamy is not an essential component of love and marriage." Lesbian activist Paula Ettelbrick put it this way:

"Being queer is more than setting up house, sleeping with a person of the same gender, and seeking state

Being queer means pushing the parameters of sex, sexuality, and family

approval for doing so. . . . Being queer means pushing the parameters of sex, sexuality, and family, and in the process, transforming the very fabric of society. . . . As a lesbian, I am fundamentally different from non-lesbian women.

. . . In arguing for the right to legal marriage, lesbians and gay men would be forced to claim that we are just like heterosexual couples, have the same goals and purposes, and vow to structure our lives similarly. . . . We must keep our eyes on the goals of providing true alternatives to marriage and of radically reordering society's views of reality."

I can produce many pages of such quotes. What is of real interest here is that even some of the mainstream media are beginning to catch on. Indeed, in no less of a leftist stalwart as the *New York Times* appeared this very telling article about the fundamentally different nature of homosexual relationships.

The *NYT* piece mentions a "study to be released next month is offering a rare glimpse inside gay relationships and reveals that monogamy is not a central feature for many". The article continues, "New research at San Francisco State University reveals just how common open relationships are among gay men and lesbians in the Bay Area. The Gay Couples Study has followed 556 male couples for three years – about 50 percent of those surveyed have sex outside their relationships, with the knowledge and approval of their partners.

"That consent is key. 'With straight people, it's called affairs or cheating,' said Colleen Hoff, the study's principal investigator, 'but with gay people it does not have such negative connotations.' The study also found open gay couples just as happy in their relationships as pairs in sexually exclusive unions."

An article in *Christianity Today* commenting on the *NYT* piece says: "Other same-sex marriage advocates say a legal change would transform the institution. New York University professor Judith Stacey, testifying before Congress against the Defense of Marriage Act,

Continued page 19

A focus on marriage

ACC Annual Conference on 'Marriage and the Family in the 21st century,' 2-4 September at Camden, Sydney. Details soon.

LOCAL CHURCH

Merrigum harvests fruit

They came for the fruitpicking season but found a saviour, writes SUZANNA GORMAN

The Goulburn Valley is known as the “food bowl” and is the largest stone fruit and tomato-growing region in Australia. Each year the Goulburn Valley becomes home to a variety of people from all walks of life and from all corners of the globe. They come looking for work and adventure. Typically the work attracts seasonal workers such as university kids and overseas visitors on limited work visas.

From early in January these visitors come to Merrigum and take up residence in the Merrigum Caravan Park with the hope of picking up work at the orchards and local tomato farms. The people are from many nations, cultures and age groups and arrive en masse.

This year the Kyabram and District Parish, of which Merrigum is a part, were believing in God for a ministry to these people. From this seed, we began to advertise in the town and become a physical presence in the Caravan Park, to invite these people to the Merrigum Uniting Church on Sunday Nights for free BBQ tea, worship, a brief message and a yummy supper.

Our first night exceeded our expectations with 60 people turning up for sausages and salad. The next Sunday night we saw 70 people turn up. Our average attendance was 65 but one night saw over 90 people come along. This was beyond our dreams, God had truly blessed our obedience and brought many hungry people to worship with us, hungry for food and for the word of God. God was certainly doing something big. Over the 12 weeks of the Harvest Mission we were able to feed, nurture and worship with hundreds of people.

The visitors were from Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Tonga, Fiji, England, France, Estonia, New Zealand and of course Aus-



Outdoor worship at Merrigum



Music crossed cultural barriers.

tralia. Some of the town folk joined in too and the seed of the word of God was sown into many lives. The common language fortunately was English, but many had limited comprehension. We had to stretch ourselves to find appropriate ways to communicate that would be effective and help them to understand.

By listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the message shared each week was a word in season for many. A number of pickers gave their hearts to Jesus and some recommitted their lives but many we found, already had faith which was increased as they become part of a global family of God. The love of the family of God made an immense difference to

these people and over the weeks we were able to develop relationships and friendships that will have a lasting impact on our lives and theirs. The family of God had grown, even if only for this short season and many experienced God's love and blessings.

The blessings weren't only for the visitors, as we all received as much as we gave and God blessed us mightily too! Getting out of our comfort zone and ministering the word of God to the world was confronting, challenging and exhilarating.

What will God call us into next? All I know for sure is that God is good and He is worthy of all the praise. The mission field truly is on our own doorstep.

LOCAL CHURCH

Flooding St George



MICHAEL BRUMPTON
on when Queensland's
St George was flooded
with water, prayer and
faith.

It was looking like it was going to be a bleak Christmas. By the 22nd December, St George had only received 255mm for the entire year. The last of the irrigation water had been used, or would be used by the end of December. Some crops had already missed a watering, and were beginning to have severe moisture stress. Cattle feed was in short supply, and hay was being brought in to feed stock. The river had dropped so much that water skiing was like playing a game of "dodge the stump" ... But that was all about to change.

On the 20th December, the St

George Uniting Church had a prayer service for rain. The text for the day was James 4:10, and it was a service of humbling ourselves before the Lord, and asking Him in faith, to bring the rain.

Prior to the service, the Elders' weather site was predicting quite a low chance of rain. By the evening following the prayer service, they began to increasingly forecast a good chance of significant rainfall.

On the 23rd December it began. By New Year, 183mm had fallen, and it just didn't stop. Since the 23rd December, St George has received 566mm, which is pretty much our average annual rainfall.

In the first week of March alone, St George received an extraordinary 250mm. Roma, Mitchell, Amby, and Muckadilla all received similar amounts, or even more. The Maranoa River, Bungil Creek, Amby Creek and the Muckadilla Creek all

experienced record levels, and all combined just upstream from St George to create the largest flood ever recorded for this area, with a flow of just over 300 000Ml / day flowing down the usually tranquil Balonne River.

In preparation, approximately half the town moved house in a day. Those in the lowest areas moved furniture to higher locations. Most households lifted fridges and furniture up onto tyres or bricks. Every one of the plastic folding tables belonging to the Uniting Church were scattered amongst different houses, to elevate items out of flood reach.

Along with most of the town, the people who are the St George Uniting Church worked tirelessly to help others get their belongings out of flood reach. They took in the homeless to stay. They fed the hungry, and they offered support to the needy.

It was marvellous to see how the



whole town (not just the church) were involved in this way. It was a time when I could truly see how when God had created humanity, He could look at all His creation, and say "It is very good".

However, it wasn't all very good – Creation has fallen. Some 25 houses went under water. Water-storage dam banks were breached. Crops were damaged. Stock were lost. Some who suffered no loss, allegedly through fraud, gained cash hand outs from the Government's emergency aid. There has been good and there has been evil.

This little congregation is ready to help where needed. We've helped to prepare for the flood, we've helped to set homes back in order, but now it's a matter of keeping our eyes open to see where help is needed next.

I would like to share with you a story of God's provision for one of our families. When they built their

home on the western side of the river, it was built to what they believed to be 1m higher than "the big one" (1990 flood height). As the waters approached, levels were taken, and it was then believed it was only 0.8m above the record.

With a predicted height of 13m, it was expected that water would lap the slab. Furniture was lifted, fridges and other appliances were moved to safety. As we left their home, we gathered together and prayed. "We worship a God who parted the waters of the Red Sea, and held back the waters of the Jordan. Lord, we pray that you will part the waters of this river, to keep this home dry."

That night the predicted peak was elevated to 14m, and figures of 14.5 metres were also put forward. At these levels, humanly speaking, their home could not escape inundation.

Well, the waters reached 13.5m, and the house should have been

wet, but there was one tiny patch of dry land in the middle of the waters. God is good. The home of this family remained dry when the levels indicate it should have been wet.

We praise God for His deliverance. We praise God for His provision.

The Easter story can be really sad if we remain in Good Friday. Good Friday is made bearable because we look forward to Easter Sunday.

In a town whose lifeblood is water and subsoil moisture, the flood has been a bit like Good Friday, because we suffer now, but we look forward to the coming season, and all of God's provision. God is good. Thank you for your prayers and concern.

God Bless
Michael Brumpton
 Minister, St George Uniting Church

(An edited version of this story appeared in *Journey*, the UCA Queensland magazine)

LOCAL CHURCH

Call and response



Mt Louisa House of Praise, an ACC Congregation in Townsville took their community outreach a further step with their first 'Easter Call' in 2010.

The North Queensland Easter convention came from a dream to see the Uniting Church in North Queensland strong and vibrant. The key text is Ezekiel 37. We believe God wants to raise up an army of passionate, effective Christians.

Nearly 190 people registered for the inaugural three day event, which witnessed Uniting Church speakers, Revd Dr David Pitman (former Queensland Moderator), and Pastor Rodney Minniecon (Zilmere UC, and with wide experience in Aboriginal ministries), present messages of hope and renewal.

Every age group was catered for:

- child minding at Carcoola Child Care Centre (attached to the church)
- school age children with Jane Mackie from Children's Prayer Network introducing new ideas on how to teach children to have a relationship with the living God, how to pray (even healing), how to share Jesus with friends. The enthusiasm of the kids for this ministry was amazing
- teenagers with Fiona & Ivan from YWAM - at least one made a commitment to follow Jesus.

· adults were also able to participate in various electives - Spiritual leadership, various teachings on prayer, Connecting with the Holy Spirit, children's work, how to grow your church, worship leading

· A fabulous Hungi for dinner on the Sunday night was a highlight

Organiser and Local Pastor Anne Harley said, "the fruit of the weekend will be seen as people go home to live out the renewed sense of God's call in their lives."

Pastor Anne Harley



Iona's new church hall

Not just another hall

ACC Congregation Iona West (Mackay, Queensland) reports on how they are re-thinking the use of their property.

Earlier this year the church spent time developing their goals and objectives. Included in the goals is to upgrade the interior of our Church - to give it a face lift. A long-awaited new hall has been opened and we hope to run Alpha and Alpha Marriage courses, as well as set up a new pre-school group. The old Den at the back of the church is being converted into a Men's Shed, with a grant from the Mackay Regional Council to help set up the Shed which was a great boost to our plans.

Currently we have two Sunday Services - a traditional early morning

and a contemporary Evening Service. Once a month we have trialled an extra Family Service.

With some developments through the year we are praying and talking about changing to having two services in the morning - with the possibility of our Evening people meeting instead at the later morning Service.

We have lost most of our Band members through University and work commitments elsewhere over the past two years. We are starting to see a few young families attending and need a regular Service to nurture their growth. Please pray for wisdom and unity in our decision-making and planning.

Revd Euan McDonald

Making the news in SA

The *Leader-Messenger*, a local area newspaper in Adelaide profiled David Hoffman, an ACC member and the new pastor for ACC member congregation Golden Grove Uniting Church in May.

In "History calls ... Pastor David Hoffman at the Golden Grove Uniting Church" they highlighted that his move to ministry was "as much a leap of financial as religious faith." ...

"I was part owner of a multi-million dollar business, so it was a big leap to leave that to go to full-time study supported by my wife," he said. "But that's what we together felt God was pointing us to. I was overcome by a sense of compassion for people who didn't know Jesus" ... and "excited by the energy in the congregation and looking forward to ministering with them," he says.

What happens next:

- June 18 - NSW ACC Committee
10 am: Haberfield
- June 26 - SA ACC AGM - 3 pm:
Tea Tree Gully Uniting Church ('Dig Here' seminar before)
- July 6 - SA ACC Committee 1 pm:
Glenunga UC
- July 24 - ACC Victoria Regional
Seminar: Living Faith Church
(Greensborough)
- July 26 - ACC National Council
Teleconference
- August 3 - SA ACC Committee 1
pm - Glenunga UC
- August 20 - NSW ACC Committee
10 am: Haberfield
- **September 2-4 ACC Annual Con-
ference and AGM: Camden Uniting
Church**
- October 5 - SA ACC Committee
1 pm: Glenunga UC
- October 16 - NSW ACC State
Meeting: Liverpool UC

Why the Gospel is Central at Kyabram

Former Kyabramites Col and Lesley Shenfield were the guest leaders at a weekend of events at ACC member Parish Kyabram District (14-16 May).

Col, now Rev Col Shenfield candidated for the ministry through Queensland Synod and is now minister at ACC member congregation Paradise Point.

It was a time of encouragement, and much praise and worship. Peter Bentley was also able to share on the Saturday afternoon with ACC members from Kyabram Parish, as well as several members from other congregations from the North East Victoria area. Both Peter and the Shenfields



Gospel Central meeting at Kyabram.

were warmly looked after by hosts (respectively) the local minister Revd Alan and Wendy Lockwood, and ACC local members Rev Stewart and Rayleen McDonald.

(See the Merrigum story on page 15 of this edition of *ACCatalyst*).

Destroying Marriage from page 14 said changing the law to allow same-sex partners to marry would help 'supplant the destructive sanctity of the family' and help it assume 'varied, creative, and adaptive contours,' including 'small group marriages.'

The CT article concludes with these thoughts: "Whether or not marriage law should change, the fact is that changing it to include same-sex partnerships would teach people that marriage is fundamentally about the emotional union of adults and not primarily about the bodily union of man and wife (let alone the children who result from such a union). The norms of permanence, monogamy, and fidelity would make less sense under such a change.

"Consider changes in divorce laws. The spread of no-fault divorce in the 1970s didn't just make it easier for men and women to get out of troubled marriages. It also changed people's ideas about the permanence of the institution and the responsibility parents have to their children. It had other unintended consequences as well. Studies showed that after divorce laws were changed, spouses tended to invest less in their marriages.

Economists found that spouses in states that had passed no-fault di-

vorce laws were 10 percent less likely to put the spouse through college or graduate school and 6 percent less likely to have a child together.

"Marriage rates fell and cohabitation rates increased as men and women lost confidence in the institution. Some 20 percent of children are now born to cohabiting couples, the majority of whom will see their parents split up by the time they reach adolescence. Legal changes have consequences. But no matter how marriage laws may change, we can, paradoxically, find more freedom in chastity - which calls for abstinence when unmarried and sexual fidelity when married - than in any form of open marriage."

The attempt by homosexual activists to radically alter the fundamental nature of marriage will mean nothing less than its destruction. Of course, as has been demonstrated above, that will be very good news indeed for the militant social engineers. But it will be bad news for society, for couples, and especially for children.

billmuehlenberg.com/2010/05/12/destroying-marriage/

nytimes.com/2010/01/29/us/29sfmetro.html
christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/may/11.52.html?sms_ss=facebook&start=1

Movies from page 20

3.5 million copies in print in twenty languages. The film touches on the dangers of fantasy about other relationships when one's own marriage is in difficulty, the scourge of internet pornography - the secret adultery that is consuming many marriages, but focuses on the oldest problem - living only for your own needs, rather than the needs of your spouse.

All these link to the Fire theme, a firestorm of issues can beset marriages - how can your marriage survive in a society that often says 'just move on'. This is a pretty hard-hitting film in parts, and one that is best for couple groups, rather than the general church community.

Fireproof attracted more than 4 million movie goers in its commercial release, and was the No. 1 independent film in the USA in 2008, a fact mainly reflecting the sizeable Christian market, but also the growing interest in family films.

There is an Australian connection with the films - David Nixon, Director of the new film *Letters to God* is originally from Sydney, and was producer for *Facing the Giants* and *Fireproof*.

<http://www.sherwoodpictures.com/>
Peter Bentley
ACC Executive Consultant

FILM



Fireproof

Sherwood Pictures

Movies as ministry

When you mention Christian movies, people in the church often have one of three reactions:

- they effuse enthusiastically;
- they pretend to throw up;
- they stare at you blankly.

Certainly in the USA, Christian Cinema, like Christian Music, has been a niche market, reflecting the fact they have a population size to make commercially viable productions. Christian films have often been criticised for their low budgets, poor acting, and inadequate theology, especially from liberal Christians who probably think a Michael Moore film is beyond criticism.

The last decade has witnessed an expansion of Christian film, and the production quality has also increased with many now using professional actors who have been in secular work. The success of the family drama *7th Heaven* (1996 - 2007) demonstrated there could even be a commercially successful Christian family drama with a dog named Happy.

When Alex Kendrick began ministry as the Associate Pastor of Media at Sherwood Baptist Church, in Albany, Georgia, he saw potential in a movie-based ministry and with his brother Stephen founded Sherwood Pictures as a ministry of Sherwood Baptist Church. They began producing stories for film, and involving local members in the production, as well as acting, including the senior pastor.

Sherwood has a long history of involvement in contemporary technology and ministry, including cable

television, music recording, and has a wide variety of groups and activities, including sporting and recreational facilities.

Sherwood Pictures have now produced three films; with a fourth film *Courageous*, due for release in 2011. Each of the films has received a growing audience, but the latest to be released, *Fireproof*, has received extensive coverage in church circles, and has even been shown on Showtime Drama (Foxtel). It would be fascinating to watch ordinary Australians watching this film. I can see a documentary coming up!

There is a consistent message in their films that arises from their commitment to make encouraging and life-affirming films. These films will naturally err on the side of good winning over evil or despair, and critics may say they are unrealistic and do not address continuing problems, but all of us know situations where people's lives have been dramatically changed by coming to their own understanding of God's grace and love, and growing to love God and their neighbour.

They are films essentially about relationships—with God, our neighbour, and especially our family, and are aimed especially at men, encouraging a re-examination of their relationships, particularly if they are married. There is a 'church-culture' dimension to the lives of the main characters, and the films want people to consider whether they also just part of the church culture or are do they have faith themselves?

Flywheel (2003) – "In every man's life there's a turning point"

Alex Kendrick plays Jay Austin, a used car salesman in Albany, able to take anyone for a ride, including ripping off his local pastor, and yet he is still frustrated by his life, and his family. The name of the film comes from a part that Jay needs to have to restore a triumph sports car. It is also a running theme, that unless you have a relationship with God, you are missing what is essential to life.

The biblical parallel to this story is also clear and well used in parts —Zacchaeus (Luke 19) and I leave this part for you to ponder.

Facing the Giants (2006, PG) "... With God, all things are possible."

Grant Taylor is a coach of the Shiloh Eagles, and husband to Brooke. He has coached his high school team to dismal results for six years, and the writing is on the wall. They struggle personally as well, as they have been trying to start a family and wonder why God has not blessed them with children. Taylor begins to adopt some bible teaching and encouragement in his coaching, and his life and the lives of the young people around him change.

This film is more for sports enthusiasts, especially American football, and there are parts that are a little obscure for an Australian audience, but themes about relationships and the struggle with faith will resonate. There are times when I wondered about some aspects of the theology presented, but the theological overview is oriented to having faith in God, rather than faith in God so you can win games. There have been over 7000 *Facing the Giant* local movie events in the USA, highlighting the significant role of sport and the increasing move to tap into this within the church scene in the USA.

Fireproof (2008, PG) "Never leave your partner behind"

Kirk Cameron, a professional actor who played Mike in the 1980s family sitcom *Growing Pains* is Caleb Holt, a fire-fighter and husband in a dying marriage. He would never leave his partner behind in a fire, but personally he fails to even see how unloving he has become. As his life comes to a point of decision, his father challenges him to undertake a 40 day love dare. The book *The Love Dare* is a companion to the movie, and has been a secular success with over

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