

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

# ENGAGE

August 2023 Issue 13



**The Voice Referendum:  
bringing the country with us**

*Fr Frank Brennan SJAO*



## Statement from the ACC&C Board on *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* and the Voice Referendum

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture affirms its support for the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Yes position in the upcoming Voice referendum.

We accept the invitation to walk with First Nations People in a movement of all Australians for a better future.

We believe the referendum gives the nation the chance to address an historic wrong and profound injustice marked by the brutal dispossession and denial of the dignity and rights of those who had been custodians of the land for millennia prior to 1770.

Terra nullius was always a lie. Now is the time to build on the High Court's Mabo decision of 1992 and enshrine in the founding document of contemporary Australia the special position of those whose ancestors were here before all who came after the First Fleet.

We see in the Uluru Statement of the Heart a deep spiritual notion of Creation that resonates with our own faith tradition.

We accept that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people never ceded their sovereignty and that it is based on the ancestral tie between the land and these peoples as the Uluru statement so poignantly says: "who were born therefrom remain attached thereto and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors."

We hear the call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution and for a referendum to amend the Constitution to achieve this.

We support the call for a Makarrata Commission to enable a process for agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history, convinced the truth can set us free as a just, united nation.

Impelled by the Gospel imperatives in a spirit of reconciliation and healing we look forward to working with and supporting, as a matter of national priority the development of specific proposals in relation to Voice, Treaty and Truth.

We call on all Australians to do the same.



Cover image: *Reflection of sky in river*, photo by Liz Jakimow.

This page: Meeting Place and Great Cross, photo supplied

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AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR  
**CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE**  
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

## Editorial



Our nation finds itself at a pivotal moment in its post-settlement history: a referendum to determine whether to establish a constitutionally-enshrined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to parliament and government. Despite significant divisions within the parliament and the public, including Indigenous Australia itself, with respect to the constitutional question at hand, all sides of the debate seem to be in broad agreement that the policy *status quo* has failed Indigenous Australians and that some form of constitutional recognition of the place and contribution of Australia's First Nations in the story of Australia is both appropriate and desirable.

The ACC&C Board has made a strong and unambiguous statement of support for the Voice and *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* (see inside front cover). Taking its inspiration from the Gospel, the Board accepts the "invitation to walk with First Nations People in a movement of all Australians for a better future" and commits to "working with and supporting, as a matter of national priority the development of specific proposals in relation to Voice, Treaty and Truth."

ACC&C Ambassador, Fr Frank Brennan, in his feature article on the Voice, reflects that a 'No' vote in the upcoming referendum will undoubtedly put "on hold for another generation any form of constitutional recognition of First Australians." There is much at stake before us.

Fr Brennan writes honestly and thoughtfully about the choice confronting Australians. He is critical of the process adopted by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and admits to some qualms about the chosen wording of the proposition put before the Australian people, in both cases out of a concern to maximise the chances of the

*"... all sides of the debate seem to be in broad agreement that the policy status quo has failed Indigenous Australians and that some form of constitutional recognition of the place and contribution of Australia's First Nations in the story of Australia is both appropriate and desirable."*

referendum's success. Still, Fr Brennan is a resounding 'Yes' for the Voice, encouraging those, who like him, find the wording of the proposed constitutional change less than ideal, to vote for the Voice on the basis that it would "be better for the nation and better for First Nations peoples that the change be made." If the Voice is to pass the arduous test of an Australian constitutional referendum, it will depend largely on the undecided and unsure overcoming their concerns, anxieties and uncertainties to vote 'Yes' to turning a new page in Australia's fraught post-settlement history.

Rounding out this issue's focus on the Voice are a sermon by ACC&C Research Professor, Rev'd Cannon Prof Scott

Cowdell, relating the story of Exodus in Scripture to the Voice debate, and reflections from Sarah Stitt, ACC&C Corporate Services and Events Officer, on the memorable launch of Stan Grant's evocative book, *The Queen is Dead*, held outside at dusk at the ACC&C's Meeting Place.

The ACC&C lives by the ethos of "wisdom for the common good." The constituent concepts that comprise this ethos—wisdom and the common good—are broad in their scope and purpose. As such, the Centre seeks to apply wisdom to different issues, challenges and opportunities that confront and affect our common good in Australia and beyond. The rest of the articles in this issue of *Engage* reflect that broad perspective and serve as a reminder that, while the nation's attention is understandably focused on this year's historic referendum, other issues of significance do not cease to be relevant and pressing. To that end, the Centre continues to pursue its vocation of broad public engagement.

There are articles on care for the environment, the quest for a global ethic, the celebration of culture through music and film, the shocking failure of leadership in the Robodebt crisis, the need for a new leadership for our times, spirituality and ageing, youth ministry, interfaith dialogue, ecumenism, the need for a new postsecularism and dealing with divorce in a biblical, yet sensitive and pastoral, way.

The Centre continues, as ever, to respond to its call to embody the Gospel in socially impactful ways, to the benefit and prosperity of all Australians, and all God's creation.

**Dr Jonathan Cole**

**Acting Executive Director, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture**



# The Voice Referendum: bringing the country with us

Fr Frank Brennan SJ AO

ACC&C Ambassador

Australian voters now have a clear choice to make in the forthcoming referendum. They can vote 'Yes' to the inclusion of a new chapter in the Australian Constitution which provides for the establishment of a First Nations Voice which may make representations to Parliament, ministers or public servants on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Or they can vote 'No', leaving the Constitution unamended.

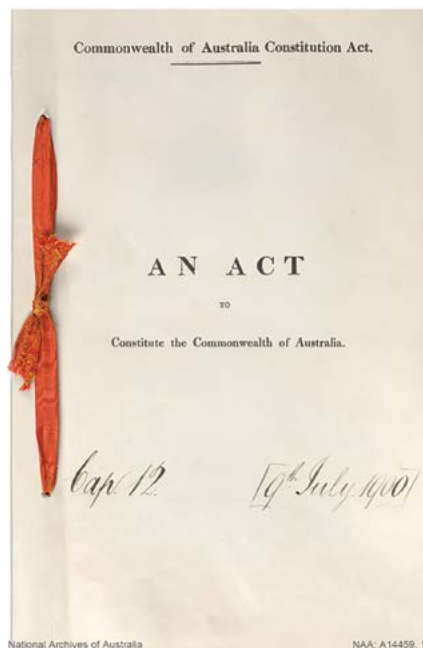
Either way, the Constitution will retain two outdated provisions which use the nineteenth century term 'race'. They are sections 25 and 51(26). The 2018 joint parliamentary committee heard evidence and concluded that "there would be broad political support for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprising the repeal of section 25; and the rewording of section 51(26) to remove the reference to 'race' and insert a reference to 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'." But it is not to be. Whichever way the vote goes, we will be left with a Constitution not fit for purpose in the 21st century.

The proposed addition of the Voice was first suggested by Noel Pearson after it became clear that the recommendation of the 2012 expert panel (of which he was a member) for a racial non-discrimination clause would not fly. Constitutional conservatives labelled it a one-line bill of rights.

The idea of a Voice was rejected out of hand by three Liberal prime ministers in a row – Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison. The present leader of the opposition, Peter Dutton, was a cabinet minister in all three of those governments.

Malcolm Turnbull worked in co-operation with Opposition leader Bill Shorten to finalise the membership and

mandate of the Referendum Council which authorised the Uluru Dialogues culminating in *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* published in May 2017. The gathering at Uluru was preceded by a series of community consultations amongst First Nations Peoples. According to Turnbull, prior to those consultations, Noel Pearson informed Turnbull and Shorten back in November 2016 that he was expecting "the Uluru conference to recommend that there be



The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 9 July 1900, image courtesy of AUSPIC

a change to the constitution to establish 'a Voice', which would be a national advisory assembly composed of and elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples." Shorten had previously said the idea had "a snowball's hope in hell." Turnbull agreed, telling Pearson: "Noel, you can recommend whatever you wish – you're entitled to my honest opinion, not my acquiescence."

*The Uluru Statement from the Heart* called for "the establishment of a

First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution." After Uluru, the Referendum Council recommended "that a referendum be held to provide in the Australian Constitution for a representative body that gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations a Voice to the Commonwealth Parliament."

The 2018 joint parliamentary committee set up to consider the way forward was chaired by Patrick Dodson and Julian Leeser. Dodson is now the Special Envoy for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Leeser was the Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians until relinquishing the position so he could campaign for the Voice. The committee included Linda Burney and Malarndirri McCarthy who are now the Minister and Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians respectively. Also on the committee was Warren Snowdon, a long-time member of the House of Representatives for the Northern Territory.

The committee was very aware that only eight out of 44 referendums had succeeded since federation. No doubt the Labor members were painfully aware that 24 of Labor's 25 attempts had failed, the only success being the 1946 referendum expanding the Commonwealth's power to grant welfare benefits.

The committee heard from a bevy of constitutional law academics including Professors Anne Twomey, George Williams, Cheryl Saunders, and Megan Davis. They were *ad idem* that a precondition for a successful referendum was some form of elected constitutional convention or sponsored parliamentary process which could include the general public making submissions about any proposed change to the Constitution.

Davis agreed with Williams regarding the “important role that a national convention might play in... enabling non-Indigenous Australians to walk through a deliberative decision-making constitutional process that enables them to better understand the exigency of a Voice to Parliament.” Twomey warned: “Constitutional commissions or other expert bodies may also be the subject of suspicion because they are invariably appointed by governments. An elected constitutional convention, on the other hand, gives the people a positive role in initiating constitutional reform. On this basis, they [the people] might be more likely to approve, or at least give serious consideration to, the products of its deliberation.”

The committee received 18 very different suggestions for wording to establish a Voice enshrined in the Constitution. For example, Patrick Dodson and Warren Snowdon proposed:

1. There shall be a First Nations Voice to Parliament;
2. The Voice shall not be a third chamber of the Parliament;
3. The Voice shall be advisory only and its advice will not be justiciable; and
4. Its powers and functions shall be determined by the Parliament of Australia.”

A couple of months after the close off date for submissions, three of the leaders of the Uluru Dialogues (Noel Pearson, Megan Davis and Pat Anderson) submitted a more expansive proposal. The committee was unanimous in the view that “neither the principle nor the specific wording of provisions to be included in the Constitution are settled. More work needs to be undertaken to build consensus on the

principles, purpose and the text of any constitutional amendments.”

The Morrison government did nothing to progress constitutional recognition. But it did establish the Calma/Langton committee to co-design a model for the Voice regardless of whether it be legislated or included in the Constitution.

The Labor Party in opposition committed itself to full implementation of the Uluru Statement. On election, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese made three captain’s picks. First he went to the Garma Festival and announced the Pearson/Davis/Anderson proposal as the preferred model of words for inclusion in the Constitution. He said it could be used “as the basis for further consultation. Not as a final decision but as the basis for dialogue, something to give the conversation shape and form. I ask all Australians of goodwill to engage on this.”

Second, he abandoned any idea of a constitutional convention or parliament sponsored process for public involvement in the design of the constitutional provision. Instead, he handpicked a Referendum Working Group of 21 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons with whom the government would negotiate in confidence.

Third, he appointed an eight-member Constitutional Expert Group including Twomey, Saunders, Williams and Davis, all of whom had previously recommended some form of public cross-party process, but who now were locked into confidential government negotiations with the handpicked group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.


After three months of these confidential negotiations which had excluded all public involvement, I wrote to the

Prime Minister on 9 November 2022 saying: “As a non-Indigenous Australian with a long-time commitment to constitutional recognition, could I put two suggestions: (1) Now is the time to set up a parliamentary committee process allowing anyone and everyone to have their ‘say’ on the proposed words of amendment to place in the Constitution; (2) Now is the time to return to formal bipartisan co-operation between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition so as to maximise the prospect of Coalition support for the referendum.”

No parliamentary committee process was set up until 4 April 2023. By that time, both the National and Liberal Parties had committed themselves to a ‘No’ vote. And by that time, the proposed wording of the constitutional amendment was set in stone. The Referendum Working Group, the government and the opposition had all committed themselves to a ‘crash or crash through’ strategy.

This has left the voters with an invidious choice.

Like a number of other lawyers, I thought the wording could be improved to enhance the prospects of a ‘Yes’ vote. Once parliament declined to change the wording, I unequivocally committed myself to ‘Yes’, and did so within hours. The government’s continued attempts to limit the practical scope of the wording demonstrate the problem I and other lawyers were addressing. The wording is not perfect. But we all now have a stark choice: ‘Yes’ to an imperfect constitutional formula, or ‘No’, thereby placing on hold for another generation any form of constitutional recognition of First Australians. I’m for ‘Yes’. I appreciate that some rusted on ‘Yes’ voters thought there should be no attempt to participate constructively in



the parliamentary committee process even though there had been no previous constitutional convention or parliamentary process for public participation. When it comes to amending the Australian Constitution, I respectfully disagree. Let's hope we can get the country to 'Yes' despite the failings of process.

Many voters who will vote 'Yes' will be convinced that the constitutional amendment is perfect, or they won't much care. But for the referendum to succeed, there will need to be a whole other cohort of 'Yes' voters – those who are not convinced that the wording is perfect but who nonetheless think it better for the nation and better for First Nations peoples that the change be made. I am one of those voters, and I would be happy if my example were to assist other voters who might be undecided to take a similar course. Regardless of the result, I do hope no future prime minister again makes a series of captain's picks without a process for public engagement. That's no way to bring the country *together* to 'Yes'. Sadly, the country will be divided whatever the outcome of the vote in October.

### Equipping young Christian leaders: making their faith count in a complex and divided world

**Rev'd Dr Tim Watson**

Director of Youth Ministry, ACC&C



In July 2023 the ACC&C began its first ever leadership development program for young Christian leaders. A dozen young leaders are taking part in the pilot five-week course, held on Monday nights in the Chapel, which uses the brand new "Difference" Course created by Archbishop Justin Welby as its core curriculum, while also making time for food, prayer, personal testimonies and theological discussion.

The Difference Course – launched by Archbishop Justin Welby at the Anglican Communion's 2022 Lambeth Conference – is the fruit of more than 20 years' experience working at the coal face of conflict transformation, first as Canon and Director of Reconciliation Ministry at Coventry Cathedral and now as Archbishop of Canterbury. At a time when religion and politics globally are increasingly divisive, and so many Christians lack the tools to deal with tensions and "disagree well" – not just between denominations but increasingly within them too – the Difference Course provides a highly effective suite of resources to help participants develop three core disciplines of reconciliation: be curious, be present and reimagine.

Open to people of all faiths and none, while also drawing unashamedly on the wisdom of the Christian tradition and the personal example of Jesus, the Difference Course is a unique resource with high potential to provide a common foundation and core spiritual practices for many young Australian Christians who are crying out to be reconciled across their differences, find hope in the midst of institutional decline, and have a voice that counts.

The ACC&C Youth Ministry team is proud to be running one of the first Difference Courses in Australia, and we look forward to developing this resource as a key tool for our ministry. In Archbishop Justin's own words, "Reconciliation is not the ending of all difference, but the transformation of how we deal with difference."

The calibre of the young Christian leaders in the pilot program, their personal and spiritual maturity, their wide range of life experiences and their willingness to engage with each other in a generous and rigorous way has been quite remarkable. It's also striking that, while keen-eyed about the failures and flaws of their denominational institutions, they all display a high degree of engagement and personal commitment to the future of the Church. Some are theological students exploring a calling to full-time ministry, while others are young professionals seeking a firm foundation for their demanding vocation as Christians in the world. It is a privilege for me to accompany them on their journey of spiritual formation and leadership development. These extraordinary young people represent the future, not just of the ACC&C, but of the Australian Church.

The launch of this pilot leadership development program has been preceded by several months of exploratory conversations and three formal youth ministry consultations with a range of key stakeholders including national denominational leaders, youth ministry experts, para-church organisations and more than twenty young Christian leaders from a diverse range of churches and cultures including

Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Uniting, Pentecostal, Christian Missionary Alliance, South Sudanese and Coptic Orthodox.


A strategic business plan is currently being finalised in conversation with the ACC&C Board and denominational partners to put in place a stable funding model for youth ministry at the ACC&C, based around the development of a core intentional community of young Christian leaders and a range of youth ministry activities including school workshops focusing on wellbeing through contemplative Christian practices, First Nations Reconciliation, creative arts and opportunities for young people to explore what it means to be a Christian citizen in the fast-changing context of modern multicultural Australia.

*We have also been blessed to receive many donations from benefactors, seeking to support the spiritual formation of young Christian leaders by passing on to a new generation the blessings that they have received. If you know of a young Christian leader who would like to participate in one of our courses, or if you would like to make a donation of \$500 or \$1000 to support the ACC&C Youth Ministry programs, please contact the Rev'd Dr Tim Watson*

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**difference.**  
The power of faith  
in a conflicted world





*“At a time when religion and politics globally are increasingly divisive, and so many Christians lack the tools to deal with tensions and “disagree well” – not just between denominations but increasingly within them too – the Difference Course provides a highly effective suite of resources...”*



*“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24)*



Gushing river, photo by Liz Jakimow





## Season of Creation: a mighty river

**Liz Jakimow**

**Communications Officer, ACC&C**

The Season of Creation is a special time for Christians all around the world to come together and celebrate God's creation. It's a time to pray, reflect, and take action for the well-being of our planet. This annual event starts on 1 September with the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and ends on 4 October, the feast day of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology.

Originally established in 1989 as the Day of Prayer for Creation by Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitros I, the Season of Creation has grown to involve churches and organisations from various denominations across the globe. The ecumenical nature of Season of Creation highlights that caring for creation is a shared responsibility transcending denominational lines. All Christians are encouraged to unite, connected through our dedication to environmental justice and sustainability.

There are many ways in which Christians and churches can participate in the Season of Creation. We can start by praying for our common home and showing gratitude for the beautiful creation that God has blessed us with. It's also a great opportunity to have Creation-themed church services, where we can reflect on the importance of taking care of our planet. Engaging in sustainable projects and advocating for climate justice are also vital ways to make a difference during this season.

Each year, the Season of Creation has a different theme, which provides us with a focal point for our reflections and actions. In 2023, the theme is "Let justice and peace flow", symbolised by a mighty river. This theme is inspired by the words of Amos 5:24, which says, "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

### **The mighty river**

In our country, rivers hold immense meaning and can bring both joy and sorrow. They are a source of life for humans and animals alike. They were important gathering places throughout the history of this country, both for Indigenous Australians and later when towns and cities were built around waterways. They are the background to many of the activities Aussies love, such as fishing and swimming.

However, our rivers are also under threat from climate change, overuse and pollution. They have been at the centre of contentious debates, such as the Franklin Dam protests or disagreements over water allocation. They can dry up, causing water shortages and impacting livelihoods. At the other extreme, they can flood, resulting in devastation, destruction and loss of life.

Yet it is perhaps in this Australian context, where we live in a land "of drought and flooding rains", that we can best understand the power of the river.





Fairy Bower Falls, photo by Liz Jakimow

Just as a river is formed by the accumulation of individual drops of water, the collective efforts of individuals and communities can create a powerful current of change. Together we can become an unstoppable force, working together to let justice and peace flow through our care for the Earth.

At the moment, I am working from my home in Araluen and it is raining. It is only light rain, barely enough to wet the ground. If the rain gets heavier, I know that I will hear the water flowing in the river near my home, and if I look up at the mountains I will see waterfalls where it is usually dry. If that heavy rain lasted for a while, the small creek at the bottom of my street would flood, entirely covering the road and making it almost impossible to drive through.

Imagine if we saw justice like that. Imagine it like a river, where a small sprinkling may not make much difference, but the difference we can make when we all join together. Imagine if the flow of justice was so great that it flowed from places where we wouldn't usually see it.

So too the imagery Amos provides of a never-failing stream (5:25), never running dry and always providing life-giving water, resonates deeply in a land affected by drought and water scarcity.

The words 'never-failing stream' sound innocuous, peaceful, safe - like a pretty picture that you hang upon a bedroom wall. It is perhaps only in a land that has been ravaged by drought, where farmers grow depressed and even commit suicide due to a lack of water, that we realise how magnificent that vision is.

A never-failing stream. A stream that does not dry out. A stream that always has water for the crops. A stream that always has life-giving water to share.

Now imagine righteousness like that.

This vision calls on Christians to embrace a righteousness that is unwavering and ever-present, fostering a continuous commitment to the well-being of the Earth and its inhabitants.

While the Season of Creation lasts for a defined period, its impact should extend far beyond this designated time. Christians are called to cultivate a never-failing care for creation, embodying justice and righteousness in their daily lives. When we all have that never-failing care and concern, when we all come together to work for righteousness and climate justice, we will indeed be like a mighty river, powerful and unstoppable, where justice and peace will flow.

### Season of Creation resources

If you want to participate in the Season of Creation and access valuable resources, visit [seasonofcreation.org](http://seasonofcreation.org). This website offers resources from various Christian denominations, including the Orthodox Church, Lutheran World Federation, Anglican Communion, Catholic Church, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance Climate Justice.



*“The ecumenical nature of Season of Creation highlights that caring for creation is a shared responsibility transcending denominational lines.”*





“Blessed are the peacemakers”, photo by Peter Castamento

## “Blessed are the peacemakers”

### Bishop Philip Huggins

Director for Ecumenical Studies, ACC&C

A woman came to the little church I am looking after – Holy Trinity, Port Melbourne. I have known her for many years but we had not seen each other to talk at depth in ten years.

She had been moved by the meditation and the space in the liturgy for centering prayer.

Highly intellectual, ‘Rachel’ told me she now receives illumination visually.

She told me of a visual experience that placed her with Jesus at the Last Supper and at the moment when Jesus, ‘troubled in spirit’, speaks to Simon Peter of his betrayal by the one “to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish” (John 13.26).

Rachel’s visual experience was of Jesus then passing the piece of bread to her (and not to Judas as happens in the biblical text).

Rachel spoke of the weight of this and of her subsequent interior questioning, given her awareness of the impact on her historically of much religion that merely engenders bleak guilt.

But that wasn’t the end of the visual experience. Then she saw that same dipping of the bread involving others whom she knows. And then others whom she doesn’t know. In fact, the experience broadened to seem to include people of diverse tribes, nations, religions – every one of the human family.

We stood there together. I was trying to take in what I was hearing. I learned years ago to listen carefully to Rachel. Her exterior presentation of self is diffident, understated, asking little. But she has worked in some of the toughest places possible with wounded people who have done some of the worst kind of wounding of vulnerable others.

Her life from childhood has been a response to violence in the peace of the Risen Jesus.

When George MacLeod was rebuilding Iona after 1938 his inspiration was to build a community of radical non-violence. There were many influences, beginning with Iona’s sixth century founder St Columba (whose name in Gaelic means ‘Dove of the Church’).

This story is covered in a beautiful new book by John Philip Newell, *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul: A Celtic Guide to Listening to our Souls and Saving the World* (Harper Collins, Great Britain, 2022).

Newell tells of how MacLeod fought in the trenches of France during World War 1 and was decorated for his bravery. Towards the end of the war he was traveling back from the front lines in a train full of soldiers, many of whom were wounded.





Newell writes: "Halfway through the journey MacLeod became aware of the presence of Christ, not somehow above or beyond the suffering that surrounded him but in the midst of its pain and brokenness. Being a man of action, MacLeod did not wait until the end of the journey to respond. He knelt down where he was in the crowded railway carriage and gave himself to Christ. This led him forever after to be looking for the divine in both the suffering and the glory of humanity and the earth. 'Christ is vibrant', he said, 'in the material world, not just in the spiritual world'. And to seek the divine in matter is to look for it in places both of beauty and of agony in the world" (ibid., p.198).

Powerful people tried to shut down MacLeod's prophetic ministry during World War 2, but the Holy Spirit will never be contained, as MacLeod's full story also makes clear, again and again.

Later MacLeod would speak of Iona as a 'thin place', a place where the distinction between heaven and earth, the spiritual and the physical is only thinly veiled.

Newell writes again: "But he did not thereby mean that every other place was 'thick'. Iona for him was a sacrament or an icon through which we glimpse the thinness that is everywhere present ... the grace of Iona for MacLeod was that it is a place where we more readily awaken to the oneness of heaven and earth, so that we may be strengthened for the holy work of serving that union everywhere" (ibid., pp.207-208).

Amen. Coming back to Rachel, this thinness *is* now everywhere. Spiritual souls of sensitivity and resilience see with a unified and unifying consciousness.

We are called to heal and do no harm. As my dear friend, esteemed peace educator John Hendry says, "we have

no licence to harm ... behaviour is only changed through kindness."

The dipped bread has only been passed to us all because the divine yearns for our human family to be in love with each other, as God is with us all.

Time and again, in ways I could not have anticipated or planned, this is made vivid to me as so-called ordinary people of many faiths, like Rachel, tell me what they are seeing and feeling.

The evidence is compelling and the task is clear.

When George MacLeod was old and near death, Newell writes that in his last days, as people visited him, he would often simply recite the Beatitudes to them, especially, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (ibid., pp.114-115).

The more this is on all our lips and in our hearts, the better things will be.



### The Voice debate, the zero-sum game and the Christian alternative

**The Rev'd Canon Professor Scott Cowdell**

Adjunct Research Scholar, ACC&C

**The following is a sermon preached by Rev'd Canon Prof Scott Cowdell at St Phillip's Anglican Church, O'Connor on 18 June 2023.**

**(Exodus 19:2-8a; Psalm 100; Romans 5:1-11; Matthew 9:35-10:8)**

Well, the debate on the voice referendum is heating up. Will we give First Nations Australians a place of dignity in our parliamentary process? As whole peoples, that is, and not just as occasional dark-skinned parliamentarians in a sea of white faces. Will we be large-souled and generous as a nation, or will the all-too-familiar Pauline Hanson-style claims carry the day: that this will entrench racial division, that it will split Australia, that it won't work? I fear that beyond what people actually admit to pollsters, it's long-nursed personal hurt and felt neglect that play a big part in the 'No' case. This often goes back to harsh childhood conditioning and reflects a lifetime of disappointed expectations: why are they getting something that I'm not getting?

In America we see the same widespread attitude in what's been called the moral despair of declining classes—clinging to white supremacy, frustrated entitlement, conspiracy theories, and an increasingly bitter hatred of anyone different—though in America there's the added scandal that this toxic brew is being dressed up as Christianity.

But in our readings today, as ever in our Eucharist, we're reminded of what Christianity is actually about, as we're summoned to the adventure of liberated imaginations and generous lives—to living a little bit high on the fumes of grace, which can free us from the zero-sum game that so many are locked into—the game of 'you win, I lose'; the joyless game of perpetually defeated personalities.

In our Exodus reading today, Moses, who Christians recognise as Jesus's great forerunner, calls Israel into a covenant of mutual faithfulness with their gracious God—the God who delivered them from the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. Here the universal God makes a particular claim, with a suffering people being given a whole new identity, a whole new future, a whole new set of possibilities in fidelity to God's promises. In our Gospel reading today Jesus reveals this same divine

intent for the lost sheep of Israel, enlisting his disciples in his own mission. They're to share with Jesus in bringing God's loving reign. This means an end to alienation and helpless outsidership, an end to living in the imaginative grip of death and despair—or at least this is what curing the sick, cleansing the lepers, casting out demons and raising the dead will look like in our time and place. This breakthrough is what the good news of Jesus Christ unleashes, and how different it is from the bad news that structures the world view of so many, making them bitter and resentful, narrow-minded and unbending.

Friends, this is the very antithesis of how the world can look for Christians. Instead, for us, we can find joy and thankfulness bubbling up where others have settled for a scarcity mentality, or a grim stoicism, or a depressive hopelessness. So, when the Psalmist today exhorts us to come into the Lord's gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise, we do so here in the Eucharist, which is a word that means thanksgiving. The Eucharist-centred life is a thankful life, a hopeful life, a joyful life, even, which is a life beyond the zero-sum game.

To see what this Christian life looks like, we have the marvellous passage from St Paul today in Romans 5. He talks about justification by faith, which carries us beyond the everywhere-popular alternative which is self-justification. So, Christians needn't be building themselves up at the expense of others, like so many who resent the non-white, the poor and unemployed, the homeless and addicted, the immigrants, the Muslims, the same-sex oriented and the gender divergent. And how have we escaped all that? Because God justifies us, because God accepts us, calling us to live free of all the poisonous baggage that's dragging down our civilisation, our world, and even many of our churches.

This is all about God overcoming bitterness and enmity in us, through Jesus who refused to look down on us or condemn us but who instead went to the cross for us, opening a whole new Easter existence beyond the death-limited imagination: of love not hate, of grace not bitterness, of forgiveness not vendetta, of open hearts not closed minds. And all this while we were too weak to do it for ourselves.



*“The Eucharist-centred life is a thankful life, a hopeful life, a joyful life, even, which is a life beyond the zero-sum game.”*

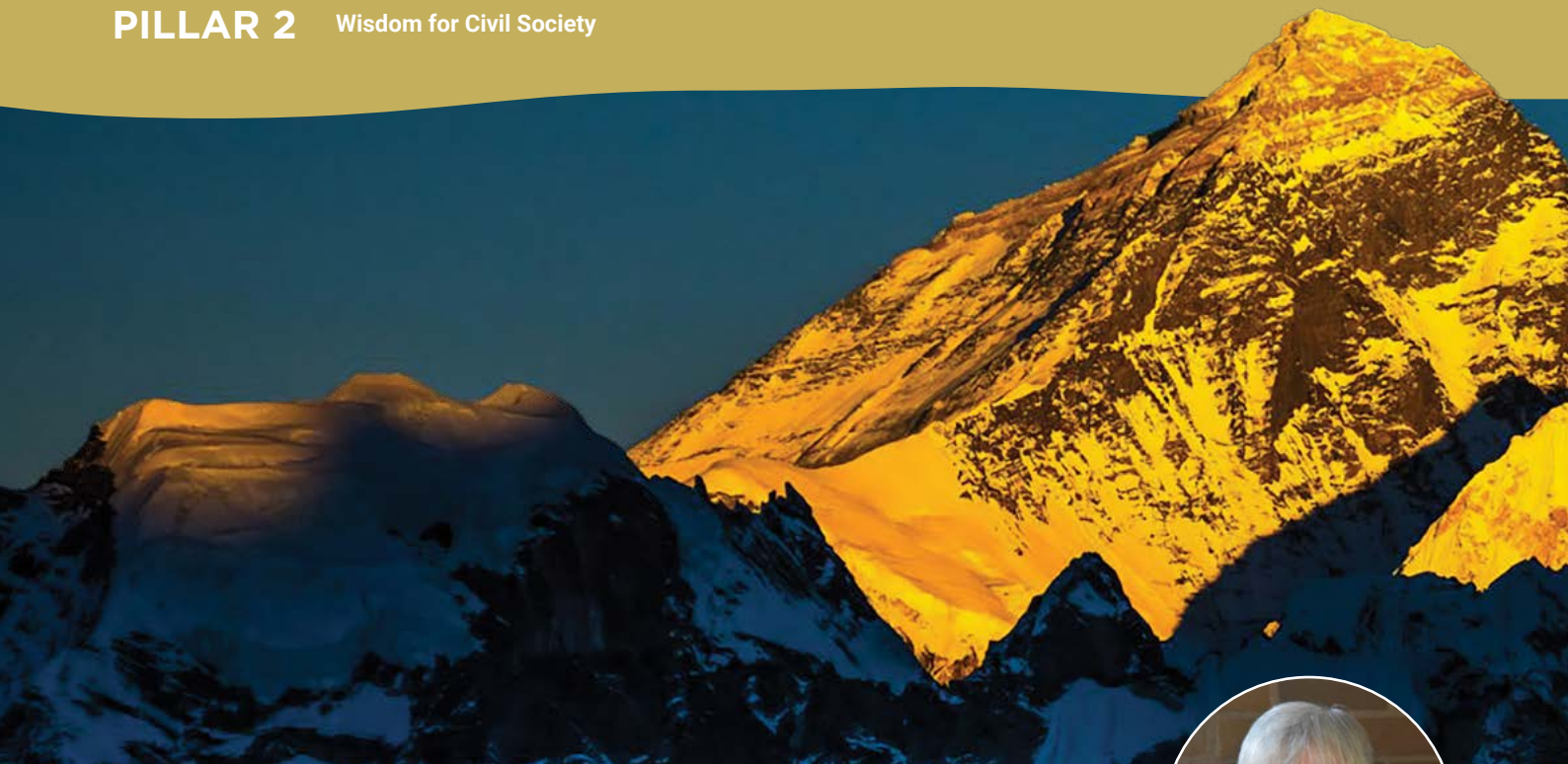
Friends, it's not self-justifying self-righteousness to recognise and name this problem that we see all around us. It's just the humble recognition that, thanks be to God, we ourselves have been rescued from that fate through our baptism into a new covenant with new possibilities. And among these possibilities is becoming agents and witnesses of this new human reality, this kingdom of God.

It's nice to see the disciples named one by one in our Gospel today, as they're sent out to demonstrate a new way of being human. In the same way you and I were named publicly in our baptism, in our confirmation, perhaps in marriage and ordination, too—named and called in these sacramental actions as sacramental agents of the human condition being put right by God. The alternative of course is the zero-sum game—a world in which bitterness wins, in which nothing fundamental ever changes, and in which even Christians forget that they have good news to share with the world.

So, finally, regarding the voice referendum, ask yourself this: how should Christians who're being set free from the besetting anxious bitterness of our times approach this issue? If the joy and good news of the gospel have begun to unseat and undo disappointment, hurt and even grievance in our lives, then how might that play out at the ballot box?



The Great Cross as seen from the Labyrinth through the calistemon hedge, photo by Liz Jakimow



Sunrise at the tip of Mount Everest, image courtesy of commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File



## The religious quest for a global ethic

**Dr Peter Hooton**

**Public Theology, ACC&C**

From a human point of view, the Earth is much smaller and more fragile today than it was just fifty years ago, and the dire cost of our relentless exploitation of its finite resources is now obvious to all but the most obdurate spirits. Nuclear weapons, climate change, and pandemic disease pose existential threats which, in their very different ways, are all products of human vanity and self-centredness. A global threat, no matter how multifaceted, demands a global response. We need a recognisably global ethic of some kind that is more than the sum of humanity's existing declarations of rights and freedoms, wars of intercession, and judicial systems of redress.

The search for a global ethic is both a search for universal values and for a better understanding of what might reasonably be thought to constitute truly global obligations and responsibilities. The religious quest for a global ethic, led in the 1990s by the Swiss theologian Hans Küng and others, exemplifies this approach. In 1993, the Parliament of the World's Religions adopted a "Declaration of the Religions for a Global Ethic," drafted by Küng. Leonard Swidler, who translated Küng's declaration into English, produced a similar framework for a "Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic" at much the same time. Küng and Swidler describe a world in crisis—a crisis exacerbated by the absence of "a grand vision, the tangle of unresolved problems, political paralysis, mediocre political leadership . . . and . . . too little sense for the commonweal." Against this background, the declarations affirm the essential unity of humanity and, with this, the 1948 Universal Declaration

of Human Rights, whose proclamations they confirm and deepen from the perspective of an ethic that seeks fully to realise the intrinsic dignity and freedom of the human person.

The elements of a global ethic briefly presented here draw substantially on the relational theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which readily lends itself to this work. Their religious and cultural locations are thus obvious, but not irreplaceable. The first element takes seriously the unity of God's creation and its implications. The notion of a Creator fosters in human beings the idea that the world has been made to some good end. It nurtures gratitude, humility and intimations of stewardship.

From the conceptual unity of creation it is only a short step to the interdependence of particular things. But what is now, for many people, an increasingly compelling way of seeing the world is still not one that may generally be said to determine their way of being in the world. To the extent, though, that people are in fact willing to take seriously into account these fundamental notions of unity and interdependence, then the arrival of someone or something new from outside should not threaten or discomfit them simply because it comes from outside.

The second element takes a radical view of otherness. The human self-consciousness, Bonhoeffer tells us, is embedded in an experience of duality—the absolute duality of God and humanity. This life-giving distinction—this essential I and Other—is the basis of all such distinctions. God gives us other





people and other people show us God. Ethical life is thus possible only in conjunction with an other-directed sociality which demands of every human being a proper sense of limitation, a certain natural humility.

The third element takes into account the nature of the human encounter with God. Bonhoeffer describes God as the encounter with Jesus Christ, the human being for others. It is Jesus Christ, "God himself [who] speaks to us from every human being; the other person, this enigmatic, impenetrable You, is God's claim on us." In this way, God "becomes visible in the concrete You of social life" and moves other human beings "out of the world of things . . . and into the social sphere of persons."

The fourth element embraces a particular view of freedom. Bonhoeffer believed human freedom to be a badge of our God-likeness for "only in that which is itself free could the free Creator behold the Creator." It is important to remember, though, that God has chosen to be free for, rather than from, human beings, which means that human beings, too, can be free only for others. There is also a freedom which is ours by virtue of Christ's role as mediator of every creaturely relationship with God. Christ stands between me and every other, which means that I must allow other people the freedom to be Christ's and to encounter me "only as the persons that they already are" for him.

The fifth element sees the notion of personal responsibility as inseparable from the existence-defining encounter with other human beings. A path of some kind leads to every outcome, and that path is determined to some degree by a person's choices. Bonhoeffer insists that we own these choices, and a global ethic would seem to require this too. No free human being can be reduced to simple obedience, or evade responsibility by making such a claim. The last step has always to be both free and responsible as we strive constantly to grasp, in every situation, the implications of God's becoming human in Christ.

The search for a global ethic will always struggle to find a way between the bland and the overly particular. But anyone who believes the present parlous state of the world to be essentially a human responsibility is obliged at least to entertain such a concept—to see the world as meaningful and whole in its own right; to embrace wholeheartedly the idea that everything is connected; to understand that God did not make others as I would have made them; to see oneself as real only in relationship, as free only for others, and as finally responsible—before God—for one's actions.

The full article will appear shortly in *The International Journal of Public Theology* as "Embodying the Transcendent: On the Way to a Global Ethic."



## The *Spiritus* Short Film Prize

**Sarah Stitt**

**Corporate Services and Events Officer, ACC&C**

In *Engage* 13 we invite you to view two more of the 2022 *Spiritus* Short Film awards - *Mourning Country* directed by Andrew Kainerd and *The Rock Pool Waltz* by Marlon Denning. Since the prize's inception in 2016 Clive and Lynlea Rodger have sponsored the prizes, being lovers of film and all that film offers. The ACC&C considers the *Spiritus* Short Film Prize and the accompanying award night to be highlights of its annual calendar of events. This year we plan to host two viewings of the prize during mid to late November, at the Canberra Dendy Cinema and in our own Chambers Pavilion. The dates have yet to be confirmed, but we hope that you will be able to come along in person to one of these viewings for the 2023 *Spiritus* Short Film Prize.

The *Spiritus* Short Film Prize is part of the ACC&C's commitment to promote the interaction between the arts, sciences and culture. The judges look for films that encompass high artistic quality, wisdom for the common good, human and planetary flourishing, universal impact and inventive expression. When considering wisdom for the common good the judges look for films which lend expression to a human viewpoint or stimulate debate, raise consciousness of the transcendent dimensions of life and/or portray spiritual values. Under human and planetary flourishing, they look for stories depicting human values that contribute to human well-being concerning respect for human dignity and rights; solidarity with all peoples; support for processes of liberation, justice, peace and reconciliation; and preserving creation and the environment. When looking for universal impact, the films that reflect local culture and help audiences to respect the language and images of that culture while seeking a universal impact beyond their national and/or local context, is highly regarded.

Following on the heels of the Black Summer bushfires and the pandemic, the three films awarded in 2022 conveyed strong environmental leanings and showed the importance of connection to either sea or land and how crucial this connection is for human and environmental health and

well-being, as well as touching on strong spiritual elements. *The Sanctuary* directed by Tim Brown and Michael Portway received the 2022 Open category award. We were able to bring this film to you in our last issue, *Engage* 12.

*Mourning Country* received Highly Commended in the Open category of *Spiritus*. In the words of one of the judges, Prof (ret'd) Greg Battye: "This is beautifully filmed, with a sophisticated structure and an elegant and subtle sense of development as the story of the fire and its impacts unfolds. It effectively warns of the risks of repeated events of this kind, from not paying attention to the effects of climate change and what we can do to control it, but without beating its audience over the head. This subtle approach is perhaps more liable to bear fruit. Meanwhile, it certainly makes for a beautiful, though alarming, film."



*The Rock Pool Waltz* poster.

Marlon Denning and his *The Rock Pool Waltz* received the award in the Under 18 Schools section. Greg Battye's comment for this film was: "IMHO [in my honest opinion] this is a documentary star in the making. The film is excellent in any competition, but given the age of the film maker, it's extraordinary." When Marlon entered his film, he was 14. We were pleased that he was able to attend the award night here in Canberra along with his parents.

In Clive Rodger's words: "We see in film the ability to convey something of the world and relationships, of joy and despair, of satiation and of loss. Film probes the mysteries of life, its tragedy, its fealties, its exuberance and betrayals. Through film we may enter experiences of suffering or elation, disintegration or love. Filmcraft can offer us nuanced understandings of life, its complexities, mysteries, paradoxes and antimonies."

Enjoy!



## A new series at the ACC&C, 70 Not Out! with David Pereira

**Sarah Stitt**

**Corporate Services and Events Officer, ACC&C**

We have many callers at the ACC&C. The doorbell chimes frequently – enquiries, tradespeople, meeting guests and the like. On this occasion when I answered the door it was David Pereira, cellist. It was a delight to greet this familiar face. Neither was expecting to meet the other. David had popped by on the chance that we might be able to assist him. He was making an enquiry, and whilst his initial idea did not come to fruition, another thought developed. He offered that he might create a series of performances, six – no less! which would take place in the Chapel in partnership with the Centre. And so, on 10 May 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed.

On a gorgeous winter sunny Sunday afternoon in July the first performance took place with about 130 people attending. The series is titled *70 Not Out!* and this concert was called “It has to Sing”. David shared that this is something which, when teaching and learning a musical instrument, students hear again and again, that the instrument they are playing – ‘has to sing’. Making an instrument sing is not only about technique, it is the fervour and passion which is conveyed from the musician through the music and the instrument. It is what gives the music life!

I have to say that this first concert, and I am far from an expert in these matters, was a real treat. The performance began with the four movements from Felix Mendelssohn’s *Sonata in D Major Op. 58*. I revealed my ignorance when I, along with many in the audience, applauded after the first movement, thinking that it was finished. My neighbours did not applaud and I naively whispered “was that ok?” to be informed, that it was not the whole. We would have to wait. Which we did. It was sublime.

Following this we were treated to two solos by pianist Edward (Teddy) Neeman. He explained that Bach’s *Morgenlied* had been transcribed for piano by Ignaz Friedman, who had escaped Nazi Germany during the second world war and arrived in Australia. *Morgenlied* for piano was written here during the year he died in 1948. The second solo piece was from Australian composer Moya Henderson, called *Cross-hatching*, which Moya wrote in response to Northern Territory Indigenous painting techniques. She composed this piece to encapsulate the essence of indigeneity in this land. We were informed that it would be about eleven minutes. The audience was moved through quite a few emotions, from tranquillity to more heightened feelings, and back again.

The concert introduced to the audience a young vocalist, Lillian Frømyhr. A stunningly beautiful voice with many melodic timbres, singing her original pieces. She will be releasing her own EP later this year.

All three musicians were stars. David conveyed to the audience the nuance of the music through both his playing and his body language. As an onlooker I could feel the discipline, both mental and physical, the strength and endurance required for the chosen repertoire. The penultimate pieces, the interplay of two Bach compositions, *Serendipity* and *Ave Maria*, for piano and cello, just amazing. Then the finale of Brahms’, *Sonata in E Minor Op. 38*, where the musicians were one with their instruments, especially David with his cello. The audience was simply transported to another realm.

David has set himself a challenge in what is his 70th year. That Sunday the innings belonged to David and his fellow musicians, Edward Neeman and Lillian Frømyhr. In thinking more about this concert, and the proposed series, I feel that we are honoured by this offering. One might consider that it was serendipity when David rang that doorbell just a few short months ago.



Lillian Frømyhr, Edward Neeman David Pereira, “It has to sing”, 70 Not Out! series, photo by Peter Hislop

# PILLAR 4

## RESILIENCE IN INSTITUTIONAL LIFE AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP



### A failed project struggling to be revived – governing with integrity

**Paul Bongiorno**

**ACC&C Board Member, and Journalist**

The morning the shattering findings of the Robodebt Royal Commission were released the Prime Minister declared to the nation: “The scheme was a gross betrayal and a human tragedy...It was wrong, it was illegal, it should never have happened, and it should never happen again.”

Commissioner Catherine Holmes, after hours of forensic examination and interrogation of all the key people involved at the top of government and the Australian Public Service, summed up her verdict in stark terms. The Commissioner said the debt recovery scheme targeting half a million vulnerable Australians was “a crude and cruel mechanism, neither fair nor legal and it made many people feel like criminals. In essence, people were traumatised on the off chance they might owe money. It was a costly failure of public administration in both human and economic terms.”

Holmes broadened the scope of her conclusions beyond this one scheme. She said the ministers and the public servants “betrayed the trust of the nation and its citizens for four-and-a-half years with an unlawful scheme which the Federal Court has called the worst chapter of public administration.” What was uncovered in excruciating detail was incontrovertible evidence that the very underpinnings of our system of government have been trashed at great cost to the nation.

Among her 57 recommendations are rule changes for governance that are almost banal in their application of obvious common sense in a Westminster style democracy. For example, Recommendation 15.1 says “The Budget Process Operational Rules should include a requirement that all New Policy Proposals (NPPs) contain a statement as to whether the proposal requires legislative change in order to be lawfully implemented, as distinct from legislative change to authorise expenditure.”

The Commissioner herself has grave reservations as to whether this damage can be satisfactorily repaired. She queries “whether a public service can be developed with sufficient robustness to ensure that something of the like of the Robodebt scheme could not occur again.” She says this

“will depend on the will of the government of the day, because culture is set from the top down.” What we are getting is a long overdue reality check on the engine rooms of governance – the cabinet and the public service were no longer operating according to the norms and conventions of the Westminster system, let alone the moral imperative to “be honest in the conduct of public office.”

The two issues at play here are the performance of the ministry and the public service. But make no mistake, it is always the Prime Minister who sets the tone and fosters the culture they believe will serve their political interests best. The nobbling of a public service’s ability to give “frank and fearless advice” and the resources to assist in the development of policies to serve the public interest is in crisis, and needs to be addressed urgently. The Price Waterhouse Cooper’s revelations, of consultants doing the work of the public service at a cost of billions of dollars only to betray the government’s trust for their own profit, make reform even more pressing.

The politicisation of the upper levels of the public service has been coming for a long time – not many in Canberra can forget John Howard’s “night of the long knives” in 1996 when he sacked six departmental heads, oversaw the sacking of 11,000 public servants and began a wholesale outsourcing of a range of government services. Howard’s Liberal successors in the Lodge after 2013 continued the assault by cutting \$8 billion in savings from the Australian Public Service and in their first two terms slashing a further 19,000 jobs.

One retired senior mandarin who served under Liberal and Labor prime ministers says, against this background, that Morrison’s laying down the law to the APS after his surprise 2019 election win was a cultural wrecking ball. In August of that year, Morrison gave a speech to public servants in Canberra defining their jobs only in the narrowest terms of being an obedient cheer squad. Morrison said: “It’s about telling governments how things can be done, not just the risks of doing them, or saying why they shouldn’t. The public service is meant to be an enabler of government policy and not an

*“Rather than say that God is Truth,  
I should say that Truth is God.”*



obstacle.” As we saw in the Royal Commission, that message was taken to heart as staff second guessed their ministers, telling them what they wanted to hear, or more to the point, not what they didn’t want to hear.

Four of the 14 senior ministers, including the then Prime Minister, departmental heads and lawyers have been referred to the Australian Federal Police, the National Anti-Corruption Commission and professional conduct bodies for public servants and practicing lawyers. The report suggests issues of misfeasance of public office, perjury and grave misconduct are in focus for civil claims or criminal charges.

Holmes asked for an extension of time so her final report could be presented after the National Anti-Corruption Commission was fully operational. In the NACC’s inaugural chief, Paul Brereton, she certainly has found a like-minded sentinel of public integrity. Brereton says the operation of the NACC is “an inflection moment when we can make an enduring difference to the ethics and integrity of the governance of the Commonwealth.” He even laboured the point that he was not running a court of law but an investigative body applying standards of fairness, openness, transparency and accountability increasingly demanded by the Australian people. Corruption – where private interest, whether it be personal or party political – he says, “erodes public trust in government and the institutions of state and undermines democracy.” The Royal Commission like the NACC was given almost unfettered powers to uncover the unvarnished truth as a remedy to the corrosive distortion of it. Truth can cut between the marrow and the bone.

The father of Indian independence, Mahatma Gandhi, was not afraid to characterise truth in absolute terms in his political discourse. You may remember a scene in the movie *Gandhi* that dramatised this. The great Indian leader stepped down from his campaign train with one message for his enthusiastic supporters:

“Rather than say that God is Truth, I should say that Truth is God.”

I mention Gandhi’s view to make a fundamental point. Truth is of a piece.

I am not suggesting Anthony Albanese should wear a dhoti and sandals, but I would hope his commitment to integrity is as resolute. It is not an optional extra to the proper functioning of any enterprise, let alone the governance of Australia for the common good.

The Prime Minister acknowledges this in his code of conduct for ministers, which, by the way, is substantially the same code Scott Morrison had for himself and his ministers:

“The Albanese government is committed to integrity, honesty and accountability and ministers in my Government (including assistant ministers) will observe standards of probity, governance and behaviour worthy of the Australian people.”

In making this commitment, Albanese, like Morrison, is setting his government up for the sort of reckoning the Robodebt Royal Commission has metered out to the Coalition’s performance in the \$1.8 billion scandal that led to pain and suffering for thousands of vulnerable Australians. Commissioner Holmes had a salutary observation for the nation’s leaders going forward. She said her inquiry “has served the purpose of bringing into the open an extraordinary saga, illustrating a myriad of ways that things can go wrong through venality, incompetence and cowardice.” There was never a golden past and all too often corruption and abuse of power was kept hidden. But contemporary Australians, Commissioner Brereton says, after the last election are demanding more.

The Prime Minister says his government “will be committed to not just putting this report on a shelf but making sure that it can never happen again and making sure that the government responds in an appropriate, ordered and considered way.” Hopefully this is a harbinger for the sort of government Albanese says Australians deserve and one which he will strive to deliver. Voters are sure to mark him down badly if he fails.



Gandhi, photo courtesy of photo Division, Ministry of Information Broadcasting, Government of India, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



## Leaders for our times

### Professor Stephen Pickard

#### Research Scholar, ACC&C

What kind of leadership is required to help people and institutions navigate the times we are living in? How do leaders avoid quick fix responses? Is there a kind of leadership appropriate for institutions compared to say organisations, clubs, small groups etc?

Generally speaking the kinds of leaders that emerge in society today reflect the anxieties and avaricious nature of host cultures; whether it is politics, business, church, education etc. In the political domain, knee-jerk reactions pander to populist voices. Such voices may sound authorial and decisive, but only succeed in leading people blindly over a cliff!

We are also familiar with the current obsession of leaders with the next strategic restructuring. It can feel at times like moving deck chairs on the Titanic!

This certainly saps energy, people fall by the wayside; good Samaritans are few and far between.

When society is under pressure and life becomes more uncertain, and for many precarious, two options seem to dominate: (a) strong populist appeal desires charismatic/demagogues; a kind of top down bossing approach to leadership and (b) the manager type leader whose general lack of vision and capacity to navigate change is usually masked by over-exertion in reordering current arrangements as a way of coping with rapid change, uncertainty, rivalrous and brittle social compacts. Both options invest heavily in relocating responsibility via blame and

scapegoating. Both options indicate a failure of nerve when it comes to the exercise of genuine leadership. The results of such leadership are plain to see at the personal level in lives and careers destroyed or paralysed. At the institutional level, such leadership generates a breakdown in trust and confidence, and loss of cohesion and purpose. This is being played out as I write in contemporary Australian society.

Periods of transition and instability require leaders who are adept at helping people and institutions (a) navigate the transitions that are occurring (b) live with the uncertainties of the times and (c) infuse a sense of hope which

*“The practice of solitude might be that missing ingredient necessary for the wisdom of leadership in times of uncertainty and crisis.”*

breeds resilience that is neither cheap nor shallow. Such leadership is invariably collaborative and embodies the timeworn virtues and gifts of the Spirit espoused in the Christian tradition. Such leadership is costly. It requires resilience and mercy, wisdom and discernment of the times; a deep and loving understanding of people; a realistic and humble assessment of the human condition; an emotional and spiritual maturity born of the habit of solitude; and capacity to collaborate with others as a way forward is crafted. There are three domains here that are interdependent: skills, competencies, character. The first two without the third

are empty; the third without the former two is blind.

We have an intuitive sense that character is fundamental, yet we also know it to be an illusive and hard to capture concept. With respect to leadership, I would focus it around two questions (a) *what have you done with your suffering?* (b) *what have you done with your solitude?* Both questions are indicators of the degree to which someone has grown in understanding of oneself and others. The second question is particularly apposite in a covid world. For example, recent writings on loneliness, aloneness and solitude highlight the interesting interplay between these three experiences and

how they might be relevant to times of isolation.<sup>1</sup> One author notes that “the human instinct to socialise has always been balanced by an urge to withdraw into solitude”.

It was Aristotle who referred to solitude as “the bird which flies alone”. The British writer John Cowper Powys comments that it is “only the cultivation of interior solitude, among crowded lives, that makes society bearable”.<sup>2</sup> David Vincent notes that the rise of modern technology is both a blessing and curse, having on the one hand introduced us to ‘networked solitude’ yet on the other hand made it more difficult to enjoy the benefits of solitude. As he notes distraction is only a click away! A surveillance culture is hard to escape from, and solitude is an endangered species. The reviewer comments that the ‘lockdown’ and associated social

1. For reviews of two such works see *The Economist*, May 2-8, 2020, pp. 66-68, wherein the writer cites (a) Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness*, OUP, 2020 and (b) David Vincent, *A History of Solitude*, Polity Press, 2020.

2. *The Economist*, p. 66.

3. *The Economist*, p. 12.



isolation has put the question of solitude 'at the heart of politics'. On the one hand, it has highlighted the tragedy of those dying alone, while for others it has proved a 'strange blessing'.

In the same volume of *The Economist* one letter writer reflects on the way leaders responded to the Plague of Athens (430 BCE). The writer draws attention to the remarks of Thucydides regarding the behaviour of the leaders of Athens at the time who "stopping at nothing in their struggles for ascendancy", care little for the good of the state "but making party caprice of the moment their only standard".<sup>3</sup> He adds in words that ring true for today that "In this contest the blunter of wits were most successful".

Perhaps the solitude of the ancient monastics has much to teach today's busy and anxious society. The practice of solitude might be that missing ingredient necessary for the wisdom of leadership in times of uncertainty and crisis.

I am reminded of the gospel stories of Jesus as one who sought times of aloneness and solitude. It was part of the mix of a life constantly being regenerated and focussed on the task and calling before him.

The ACC&C has been in operation for a quarter of a century, a unique Centre straddling two institutions: church and academy. Leading such an entity at the interstices of different social systems draws attention, not simply to issues of skill and competence but to matters of character and the critical questions it provokes.



Maritime Museum Lighthouse, photo by Liz Jakimow



## Memorable moments, meaningful meetings and ... a moose?

**Sally Mordike**

PhD candidate, Charles Sturt University, Adjunct Research Associate, ACC&C

**Reflections on the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Ageing and Spirituality**

**4-7 June 2023, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada**

The field of spirituality and ageing is one of the most important areas of ageing healthcare, yet spiritual and pastoral care still seem to be shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding for many who work in the aged care industry. With spiritual care now a reportable element in Australian aged care standards, what does it actually look like? How is effective spiritual care provided for older people – both within aged care and in the community?

These sorts of questions sparked the practical focus of the 10th International Conference on Ageing and Spirituality, held this year at Conrad Grebel University College in the beautiful university town of Waterloo, in Ontario, Canada. Held biennially, the conference brings together researchers and practitioners from around the world to share knowledge and best practice, ideas and support. Over the years the conference has facilitated meaningful networking and provided a forum for sharing research and experiences in the field of spirituality and ageing.

The theme of this year's conference was *Challenges and Choices: Spirituality and dignity in later life*. Changing times are bringing both opportunities and challenges: in life expectancy, prevalence of dementia, choices in medical care around dying and death, use of technology, and more. Each keynote speaker, panel discussion, paper presentation, workshop, seminar and round table discussion, as well as field trips and delicious mealtimes, provided wonderful opportunities to share

research, knowledge and experience, as well as inspire and create meaningful connections for all who attended: connection with others who are working in the same field, who share a desire for meaningful spiritual care for older people; connection with practical and effective strategies for spiritual care in a variety of settings; and connection with ourselves as we face the challenges of our own ageing.



Bruce and Bruce the Moose with Sally, photo by Sally Mordike

From the first seminar to the final slideshow presentation, there was a true sense of being in a loving community, and generous giving of knowledge and resources. Academic research shared the stage with on-the-ground practitioner knowledge, with deep respect. We listened to presentations about dying, death and compassionate palliative care, about disease, dementia and hope, and about serving others in different ways and contexts. The respectful atmosphere allowed for disagreements, questioning and differences of opinion, as well as frequent laughter and unavoidable tears.

And we had fun! Those of us staying in the student accommodation at the College enjoyed hunting for coffee each morning and hilarious discussions late into the night. Throughout the conference there was a running joke about whether or not moose actually existed in Canada, as all my efforts to see one had drawn a blank. (I even went to the Toronto Zoo, but the moose were on holiday as their enclosure was being renovated!) So, naming a toy moose became a conference activity, and many moose-sighting stories were shared over mealtimes. Six of us were there from Australia, so a distinct Australian flavour entered some presentations – including introducing the lyrebird as a metaphor for spiritual carers as people who echo back to others their own beautiful stories.

After years of not being able to travel, to finally be able to re-connect in person, to learn from and encourage one another, to share moments of joy, compassion, deep respect and love, was more than wonderful: it was uplifting, inspiring and lifechanging. I returned from Canada exhilarated, renewed in spirit around the work I am doing in my PhD, and incredibly inspired by others' stories and research.

### **Want to experience the conference for yourself?**

All keynote, plenary and panel presentations – as well as the final conference slideshow – were video-recorded and are available from the University of Waterloo website for a small registration fee. This "virtual registration" will be open until the end of September 2023 at <https://uwaterloo.ca/ageing-spirituality/registration>.



## ► *The Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies (CAPS)*



Sharing joy with Conference participants, photo by Sally Mordike

*“The field of spirituality and ageing is one of the most important areas of ageing healthcare, yet spiritual and pastoral care still seems to be shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding for many who work in the aged care industry.”*

### **Acknowledging the 2023 International Conference Planning Committee**

Grateful thanks to Jane Kuepfer and Dana Sawchuk (Canada), James Ellor and Susan McFadden (USA), Keith Albans (UK), Elizabeth Pringle, Ann Harrington and Sally Mordike (Australia), and honorary committee member, Elizabeth MacKinlay (Australia). The 11th International Conference on Ageing and Spirituality will be held in 2025 – we'll keep you posted!

### **Examples of the overwhelmingly positive delegate feedback:**

“The atmosphere was just so welcoming and friendly.”

“It was a delight to be there – so much rich input, so many great people to talk to.”

“The camaraderie of the group and the shared interest provided many opportunities to connect. The experience of living in community was moving as well.”

“The Australian contribution overall was intense and creative and gave a sparkle to the whole thing.”

“It was just a pleasure to talk with people who work in this field!”

“What went well? Experiencing community and solidarity in sometimes lonesome questions by meeting world exemplars at the conference”

“Attendees from other continents brought their unique insights and abundant love.”

“Amazing. So special. This conference really fed me.”

“The conference was informative, knowledgeable, beneficial and enlightening: it stretched my thinking.”

“Moving and meaningful – provided exceptional possibilities.”

“Thoughtful, rich input. It will shape me.”

“The content was amazing. All was of the highest quality.”

“It was the best conference I've been to – and I have been to lots – the small size and personal contributions made it authentic.”



Sally Mordike and Prof Liz MacKinlay, photo supplied

*Save the Date! The Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies (CAPS) is organising a **National Conference on Ageing and Spirituality** in Canberra, 22-24 September 2024 – more information will be available on the ACC&C website later this year!*



## “At the heart of the marriage of heaven and earth is a dance.”

### **Bishop Philip Huggins**

**Director for Ecumenical Studies, ACC&C**

Every life is precious and to be cherished. Do we not know this deep in our being? As we listen to what our soul already knows, the key contemporary challenge is to live with loving respect for this earth and all created beings. To this end, we do gain strength and light from those before us who have lived with this sacred imagination and seen what can be. Those spiritual geniuses before us shape our contemporary question:

*What might yet be if our most attractive power, our capacity for love, was to fully flow?*

If this can happen, wouldn't the human family be really dancing?! Heaven and earth would then seem to touch, we can imagine, as love overflows. Yes, overflows with and for those whom we carry in our hearts and also for those in the headlines: people on the Mediterranean, vulnerable to people-traffickers; children growing up in refugee camps - in Jenin, Jerusalem and in Khartoum, South Sudan; young girls in Afghanistan and Iran; those on the front-line of the callous cruelty inflicting Ukraine, Myanmar, many places. People not in the headlines this week, but maybe next week. People hidden from view, victims of domestic violence and modern slavery, for example.

It can be a beautiful dance, this life on earth, if only we wake up to who we are! Sacred beings on a sacred earth. From many religious traditions, the message is one of compassion<sup>1</sup>. The possibility is to live with this unifying compassion. I can say this confidently after 40 years and many friendships with people of all major faith traditions.

A vivid and urgent expression retelling of what can yet be is in a new book by John Philip Newell, *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul: A Celtic Guide to Listening to our Souls and Saving the World* (Harper Collins, London 2022). One of the inspiring and beloved Celtic saints John Newell portrays is “the golden-haired Brigid of Kildare” (ca 451-523). In John Duncan's painting, Brigid is being carried by the angels from Iona to Palestine, transcending time and space, for the birth of the Christ Child. The Incarnation conveys, as the Celtic Saints appreciate, that “matter matters!”

As Teilhard de Chardin was to say, even as Church authorities were trying to shut down his prophetic voice, recalled by John Newell, there are:

“no boundaries to be set on the Christ mystery, by which he meant the conjoining of heaven and earth, the marriage of heaven and earth, the marriage of spirit and matter, which is everywhere present. This mystery is not for the benefit

1. <https://www.themarginalian.org/2015/01/08/karen-armstrong-compassion/>



only of one power group or one religion or for the blessing only of those whom empire and church find it convenient to bless. This mystery is for the blessing of all, for it is the mystery at the heart of all life, all matter" (ibid., pp.178-179).

A few years ago, I was blessed to be able to celebrate the Feast of the Incarnation, the Christ Mass, in a suburban New Delhi Church of North India. To my complete surprise and delight, the Church filled to overflowing with many children and adults visibly of other faith traditions, as well as local Christians. They all came up for Communion and a Blessing that Christmas morning.

There was an intuition, transcending ideology, that the Incarnation was and is for everyone, everywhere, always. It is this intuition that Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the saints, like Brigid, embody. It is wonderful when we behold this because, as Teilhard was to say,

"Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves" (ibid., p.182).

This capacity for love, for a generosity of spirit, is what unites us and can unite us in all creation.

"All we have to do," said Teilhard, "is let the very heart of the earth beat within us" (ibid., p.190).

Whenever we glimpse this, as I did that Christmas morning in Delhi, we feel we are in the divine dance. Even though we also know this is a truth that can sometimes be repressed by a wrong use of power, such as in the work of contemporary tyrants, with their excess of loveless energy. Even though this can happen, we also know there is a well-spring from whence renewal will always come.

"Behold, I make all things new, says the One in whom all things hold Together" (Revelation 21: 1-8).

Our urgent task, assisted by the wisdom of these great souls, is, as John Newell says, to listen to our own souls and save the world.

"We are living at a critical moment of history. Will we truly awaken to the sacredness of every person regardless of gender, race or religion? Holders of power, both political and religious, are obstructing this work, and some of them are even denying the need for it. But they cannot destroy the vision of sacredness that has welled up again and again over the centuries and is now demanding our attention, perhaps like never before. There is hope. And it is based on our deepest knowing, that every human being is sacred, body and soul" (ibid., p.42).

Amen.



*Saint Bride* by John Duncan, 1913, image courtesy of Creative Commons, National Gallery of Scotland

We sing with gratitude for the bearers of love's energies, including those in the song by Bill Withers and friends, playing for change, *Grandma's Hands*<sup>2</sup>.

Complementing *Grandma's Hands*, one other little local cameo with which to conclude. As a regular swimmer, I am often in change rooms as young dads prepare their little ones for a swim or for a shower before heading home. Most often, it is very beautiful to listen as they patiently and tenderly care for 'God's little people'.

Today I commended one young dad on his gentle tone of voice with his little girl. His face shone as he took in this unexpected appreciation of him – just being his true and loving self with his precious child.

In such moments our real potential is revealed. All we are asked to do now is to make what happens in such moments, a dad with his dear daughter, the way all life is lived. Then the dance will be all we can see with our sacred imagination, even now! As the poets say, "at the heart of the marriage of heaven and earth is a dance!", as Kahlil Gibran wrote for couples<sup>3</sup>, so it can be for the whole human family. Imagine that! The spiritual geniuses of every age invite us to embrace that which we know can be!

2. <https://www.playingforchange.com/videos/grandmas-hands-kori-withers-and-friends-live-outside>

3. <https://poets.org/poem/marriage-3>



Paul Bongiorno with panellists, Derya Iner (Muslim), Santosh Gupta (Hindu), Lama Choedak Rinpoche (Buddhist), and Jonathan Cole (Christian), photo by Liz Jakimow

## Exploring faith and politics: insights from an ACC&C interfaith dialogue

**Liz Jakimow**

Communications Officer, ACC&C

In a country where adherence to Christianity is declining and religious diversity is increasing, the question of how faith intersects with politics becomes increasingly pertinent.

On 12 July, the ACC&C, in partnership with Bluestar Institute, hosted an interfaith dialogue on the topic of “Faith and the Democratic”. The event aimed to foster understanding and encourage respectful engagement among people of different religious backgrounds on the topic of religion and politics. Facilitated by distinguished political journalist Paul Bongiorno, the panel comprised of representatives from four different faith traditions: Derya Iner representing Muslims, Santosh Gupta representing Hindus, Lama Choedak Rinpoche representing

Buddhists, and Jonathan Cole representing Christians. Together, they delved into the question, “Should faith-based traditions engage in politics?” The dialogue provided unique insights into the intersection of faith, politics and democracy, highlighting both shared values and nuanced differences.

While each panellist represented their faith, there was also acknowledgement that others in their own religion might disagree. Acting Executive Director of the ACC&C, Dr Jonathan Cole, noted that there is a lack of consensus regarding political engagement even amongst Christians. Yet despite disagreements, there was much for the panel to agree on.



### Faith and politics – the panellists’ views

The panellists unanimously agreed that democracy was a good thing. They also mostly agreed that faith-based traditions should engage in politics in some way, although the Hindu and Buddhist view leaned at times more towards not participating in politics. Lama Choedak Rinpoche thought ideally Buddhists should not be involved in politics, but added that “Buddhists are humans too”. If Buddhists do engage in politics, then it should be done moderately. Hindu representative, Santosh Gupta, said Hindus should only become involved in politics if something is affecting others.

The reasons for engaging in politics, and what form that political engagement should take, were seen as important questions to consider. Compassion and justice were important reasons for political engagement for all four members of the panel. Assoc Prof Derya Iner, Research Coordinator at the Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation at CSU, said politics should not be for financial gain or to secure privileges. Jonathan Cole gave the commandment to ‘love your neighbour’ as one of the compelling reasons for Christians to engage in politics, as the political realm is where decisions affect the material wellbeing of our neighbour.

The second reason Jonathan Cole gave for Christians engaging in politics was the nature of democratic citizenship. He noted that while liberal western democracies are very conscious of their rights and benefits stemming from citizenship, they are less conscious of their duties and obligations. As citizens, Jonathan argued that we have a duty to at least be minimally interested in and concerned with politics, in ways that impact the health of a democracy. Derya Iner said her faith encourages her to make a positive difference in society. As we live in a democracy, it is through democratic means that we do that.

*“Political decisions need to consider the broader societal context, engage in critical thinking and respect the diverse perspectives of others.”*

### Navigating the challenges

During the dialogue, the panellists acknowledged the challenges and complexities of faith-based engagement in politics in Australia today where a growing number of people claim to have no religion (38.9% at the last Census). While other religions are growing, Christianity is declining, and now represent less than 50% of the population. There is also a growing antagonism towards religion, particularly towards religion in politics. Lama Choedak Rinpoche thought that, as Western society becomes more educated, it will also become more secular. The way that faith and politics is navigated in this world of increasing diversity of religious beliefs and secularisation is very different from how it might have been in the past.

During the dialogue, it was also noted that, while political engagement can be motivated by faith, there is also a need to find common ground amongst all Australians. Politicians are representing the people, not just members of their faith. Their decisions and actions need to reflect the wishes of everyone they represent. Any political action should be for the ‘common good’, not just to benefit members of one particular faith. Political decisions need to consider the broader societal context, engage in critical thinking and respect the diverse perspectives of others.

### Conclusion

The interfaith dialogue on “Faith and the Democratic” provided a platform for representatives from different faith traditions to share their insights on the intersection of faith and politics. The discussion highlighted the nuances, challenges and shared values within faith-based engagement in politics. The panellists emphasised the need for individuals of faith to actively participate in democratic processes, guided by principles of justice, compassion and the pursuit of the common good.

The interfaith dialogue encouraged participants to engage in respectful and informed discussions, recognising the value of diverse perspectives and the importance of working together for the betterment of all. It served as a reminder that faith and politics can coexist in a way that upholds democratic principles, respects diversity and fosters a more just and inclusive society. When faith-based political engagement is guided by respect for other faith traditions and respect for people with no religion at all, it can work towards the common good.



## A new postsecularism

### Professor Wayne Hudson

#### Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society (CRES)

Scholars associated with the Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society (CRES) are now collaborating with scholars at Western Sydney University, the University of Wollongong and Notre Dame in order to develop a new and specifically Australian postsecularism.

Today, a postsecularism may be possible that does not accept without question the modern world conception or European conceptions of modernity. Postsecularism is a term with many possible meanings. It does not have a single precise sense.

Currently postsecularism may refer to:

- a range of theories or claims about the persistence or return of 'religion' in the world generally or in the West;
- the claim that the secularisation thesis has now failed or has been shown to be a contingent and not a necessary development (Charles Taylor);
- the claim that the secular and the religious are not necessarily in conflict and that secular and religious citizens need to learn from each other (Habermas);
- the claim that religion has returned as a central topic in international relations (Casanova, Mavele and Pettit);
- the claim that religion can have or should have a role in the public sphere (Mendieta);
- the claim that post secular culture is now an important part of popular media and digital culture;
- the claim that post secular society has now emerged;

- the claim that we now live in a post secular age;
- the claim that post secularity is the spiritual condition of societies in the West.

The first discourse about the post secular came into prominence in German texts almost twenty years ago, and passed into English three or four years later via a range of mistranslations. The finer points of the arguments in German about the translatability and non-translatability of religious contents into secular or public reason were lost in the American discussions, the issue of the inability of democracy to ground itself normatively were largely bypassed, and a vast literature concerned with political theology emerged based on the legal philosophy of the Nazi legal theorist Carl Schmitt. Much of the literature in English was imprecise and managed to ignore most of the world including Russia, India, Iran and Indonesia.

The first postsecularism has been critiqued on the grounds that it is Eurocentric, colonialist and/or racist, that no coherent distinction can be drawn between secularism and postsecularism, that it is covertly Christian—a claim advanced by Islamic scholars such as Talal Asad and Jewish scholars such as Peter Gordon—and that it assumes a return of historical religion, for which there is little indisputable evidence.

The new postsecularism, in contrast, will not be exclusively based on twentieth century European thought (Weber, Habermas, Taylor) and will critique such views where appropriate. While valuing *secularity* very highly, it will be critical of *secularism*, as the first postsecularism often was not, and take account of Indigenous traditions

world-wide. The new postsecularism will not uncritically reproduce the many confusions and historical errors of European sociology (which influenced the first postsecularism), but it will take into account the new evolutionary biology, especially the work of Augustin Fuentes at Princeton, and the brilliant reconstruction of twentieth century cultural anthropology by Marshall Sahlins. That is, it will be analytical, critical and sensitive to diverse international contexts, where the first postsecularism largely was not.

Applied to Australia, this means that the new postsecularism will not accept uncritically the American concept of 'the public square' or the related attempt to confine spirituality to the private sphere, and will insist that spirituality is directly relevant to many areas of human life, including work, sport and warfare. In doing so, it will challenge some aspects of contemporary political thought and practice in Anglo-Saxon countries.

*"..., a postsecularism may be possible that does not accept without question the modern world conception or European conceptions of modernity."*



## May, the month of Mary

**Dr Virginia Miller**

**Adjunct Research Fellow, ACC&C**

Italian towns are rich with religious history and traditions. This story concerns one of these traditions - the annual procession in honor of Our Lady that is held in a hill-top medieval town called Sant'Oreste.

Sant'Oreste was known historically as a village that was dedicated to Marian devotion. However, it was with the advent of a priest named Luigi Peligni that the town's Marian devotion was transformed into something quite magical. After Peligni's arrest and imprisonment for his opposition to Napoleonic troops he devoted his life to the care of Marian cults and ultimately found his home in this unique village. Under his influence the celebration of Mary increased year after year until finally it evolved into a month of daily celebrations that culminated in a spectacular procession. This tradition has now been practiced in this little village for over 200 years.

The candlelit procession is not unlike others in Italy, with an effigy of Mary processed from a major church to a chapel. However, it is distinct from other processions in two ways. Firstly, the importance of the procession is evident by the presence of the mayors from the surrounding areas, police and other professionals marching with the priests and parishioners in this solemn procession. The second striking, and famous, feature of this procession is that it ends with 1000 bundles of reeds being set on fire on Mount Soratte. At the same time a towering cross lights up and fireworks add to the spectacle.

On the day of the procession this little town of 2,000 people swells as busloads of national and international pilgrims and tourists arrive. In this throng of people, and given the spectacular nature of the event, are a mixed group that range from the devoted to the curious. Yet, the town caters to everybody. For example, during the day popular music blasts out of the bar for the local youths, theatrical performances entertain the children and street stalls abound with local food. However, notwithstanding this activity, when the procession begins the bar stops playing its music and the only thing that can be heard is the Rosary. It is certainly a wondrous feeling to hear the voices of thousands upon thousands of people praying this famous and powerful prayer.

Yet, notwithstanding this feeling during the event I asked myself if the festival was truly relevant to the church today? At times the festival with its anticipation of a great bonfire seemed out-of-date and parochial. Moreover, I doubted that many of the youths who attended the event were at all interested in the religious aspect of the ceremony, but merely the spectacle. It seems I wasn't the only person who had these

concerns given that the sermon that proceeded the procession focused on the relevance of the event in respect of the fact that the Holy Spirit never stops working in and through tradition.

Indeed, at the end of the ceremony, and in a moment of relative quiet, one of the youths I mentioned earlier shouted out "*Viva Maria!*" I sensed this call was a fun exclamation, yet, for me, it was also instructive and cured me of my doubt. For it is true that Mary is alive today, as she was yesterday. Moreover, this is the important message. Whether this truth is realised by way of a bonfire or by way of a modern ceremony is of secondary concern. What is important is that worship facilitates our feeling of transcendence and communion with God. Furthermore, there is a community remembrance in any tradition, which is important in and of itself. For instance, we know that for 200 years this tradition has endured with people across time who have, likely, shouted "*Viva Maria!*" These traditions connect us to the past. But they also reassure us that faith is alive, even in little medieval villages in far-away corners of the world.



Festivities for Mary, Month of May, photo by Virginia Miller



Prof Robert Banks with St Paul's College students, photo supplied

## On the trail of a Christian heritage in Hong Kong

### Professor Robert Banks

#### Adjunct Scholar, ACC&C

This visit to Hong Kong was the first trip my wife and I had taken outside Canberra since COVID 19 appeared. During the pandemic, we had written a book, *Children of the Massacre: The Extra-ordinary Story of the Stewart Family in Hong Kong and West China*. Beginning with the execution in 1895 of their Irish-born parents and two siblings in Fujian province, this book describes how all six surviving children ultimately returned as missionaries to China. They founded several schools in Hong Kong, started a Chinese church, played a leading role in the Hong Kong Volunteer Army, and developed a village-based Medical Service. Several members of the family also spent time in Australia.

In mid-April, the removal of travel restrictions enabled us to accept invitations from two of the schools in Hong Kong that continue the Stewart Family legacy. In God's providence, the timing of this coincided with anniversaries they were celebrating. We also planned to follow up links we had

formed with several Christians engaged in Hong Kong working in education and the marketplace. Since our last visit in 2019 had taken place during the widespread protests in the city, we were interested to observe the effects of the tighter laws introduced by the central Government.

At St Paul's College, in the Central district overlooking Victoria Harbour, we spent a morning with its Principal (who had formerly taught at Griffith University), as well as an earlier and past Deputy-Principal (a well-known Hong Kong historian). After expressing appreciation for details, they had learned from our book, and discussing the continuing Christian foundation and wider contribution of the school, we were given a tour of the earliest surviving buildings and treasured historical displays. We were also shown a professionally produced video that was part of the College's 170th anniversary public exhibition.

The following evening, we were invited as special guests to the Anniversary Service at St John's Anglican Cathedral. This was filled to capacity with past and present students, teachers and staff, as well as representatives from other schools and institutions in the city. The service was led by the Dean of the Cathedral, and the sermon preached by the Archbishop of Hong Kong. There was a commemoration of Evan Stewart, who was remembered not only for his humility and love of students but gallantry during the battle of Hong Kong (for which he was awarded a Distinguished Service Order (DSO)). The speaker also spoke of the severity of his imprisonment by the Japanese (which left him with a permanent limp). A highpoint of the service was the beautiful, passionate, and uplifting singing by a combined alumnae and student choir of "How Great Thou Art" that moved me to tears.

A week later we travelled to St Stephen's College in Stanley at the other end of Hong Kong island. At the school gate,





St Paul's College student leaders, teachers and Principal with Robert and Linda Banks, photo supplied.

we were greeted by the boy and girl captains and house-master of Stewart House. After a welcome by the Principal and School Chaplain, one of the deputy-principals hosted a full morning's schedule of events. This began with an interview about our book and visit by three senior students, that will be written up with photos, and made available to the wider school community.

The Chaplain, three staff and seven student docents who led heritage tours of the campus for visitors accompanied us to the Memorial Chapel. This was built to commemorate the massacre of nurses, soldiers and staff by Japanese soldiers who then turned the school into an Internment Camp for Hong Kong civilians. On one wall, there was a special plaque honouring Kathleen Stewart, the Principal's wife, who died a few months before the camp's liberation in 1945. Moving on to the Heritage Building, we were hosted by an elderly graduate they described as "St Stephen's Wikipedia",

who showed us significant historic documents and artefacts. After this, we walked together to Kathleen's grave in the adjacent Stanley Military Cemetery where we had a brief time for bible-reading, silent prayer, and I shared a few words with the whole group.

The visit to Hong Kong also provided opportunity to spend time with several impressive people - an afternoon with the Director of the International Marketplace Transformation network that equips business people to integrate faith and work in substantial and influential ways; lunch with an historian at Hong Kong University who is researching and writing about Christian mission in the region; a morning with a young female lecturer at the China Graduate School of Theology who also equips pastors and laypeople in her home province on the Mainland; and a conversation with the Australian pastor and wife of the main International Church in Kowloon.

Though several hundred thousand people have left Hong Kong since the tightening of central Government control, the majority of Christians remain committed to working within the new arrangements and others that may be introduced. The influence of early missionaries like the Stewarts remains a foundation and continues to inspire many a century and more later.

Robert and Linda have written three earlier books on Australian women serving in China - *View from the Faraway Pagoda; An Australian Pioneer Missionary from the Boxer Rebellion to the Communist Insurgency* (2012), *They Shall See His Face: Amy Oxley Wilkinson and her Visionary Blind School in China*; (2017), and *Through the Valley of the Shadow: Australian Women in War-torn China* (2019). Robert's latest publications are *Transforming Daily Work into a Divine Vocation* (2022) and *The Versatility of Paul: Artisan Missioner, Community Developer, Pastoral Educator* (2022).



## Stan Grant's *The Queen is Dead* – comment

**Sarah Stitt**

**Corporate Services and Events Officer, ACC&C**

Reading Stan Grant's *The Queen is Dead* as a White fella is a bit like having a bucket of ice-cold water thrown over you on a hot summer's day—refreshing and confronting to be given the opportunity to have access to what it is like to be a Black fella in Australia since the arrival of White fellas.

Stan writes he is a Black fella with privilege. Privilege that he has gained entry into the halls of the White fella. Is it a privilege? Is it a burden?

In 2017 Australians were offered *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*. Many considered it to be a gift to all - an extremely generous gift. Our then Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, rejected it out right. I felt extreme disappointment when I heard this news. I'm sure that he would have had more insight than a mere White woman who has no idea about what it is to be a Black fella in this country. However, my disappointment stemmed from not being able to grasp this opportunity for change.

Australia seems to love doing things the same way over and over again, and expecting change. This is not how it happens. Change can only occur when we try something different. Many years ago, when experiencing a personal crisis, I learnt that the one constant in life is change. For me, this was a turning point. It meant that what we tend to fear the most, change, is constantly with us. I felt that this one constant needed to be embraced. I also learnt through that time that, if you want to change something, you need to begin with yourself. That changing others will not work, that you must change yourself. I learnt too that this is hard.

Australians have an opportunity to begin a journey of change. I believe we want this, but that we are also fearful - fearful of the unknown, fearful of change. Remembering that every moment of our living selves is a journey into the unknown, perhaps we can embrace this opportunity.

When I first heard about Stan Grant's new book and that a book launch would be hosted at the Centre in May, I thought

wow, good on him, *The Queen is Dead*, where is the rest of the sentence? What response would this invoke? This is what ran through my mind. I attended the launch. I will share with you the experience of being there.

### An evening under the stars

*I have not read The Queen is Dead, yet. I did buy the book having attended the book launch on 10 May hosted around the Meeting Place at the ACC&C – a beautiful clear starry night,*

*starting at twilight and moving into the darkness. People gathered to listen to the author, Stan Grant, in conversation with Jack Jacobs, an interesting erudite Yindymarra Research Fellow at Charles Sturt University. Jack coaxed Stan to share stories from his life and that of his family. Stan shared how he felt when the news of the Queen's passing reached him. He had to work through his anger and the feeling of being cheated. He wrote this book. Mostly, however, he spoke about love. He spoke about how much this land, our shared land, means to the First Nations' people. He spoke about the pain they have endured, about their loss. Loss of place, loss of language, loss of dignity - but never the loss of belonging, hope and love. He also talked of lament. What it is to lament, and the meaning of lament.*



"Lament", original composition, words by Glenda Cloughley, music by Judith Clingan.

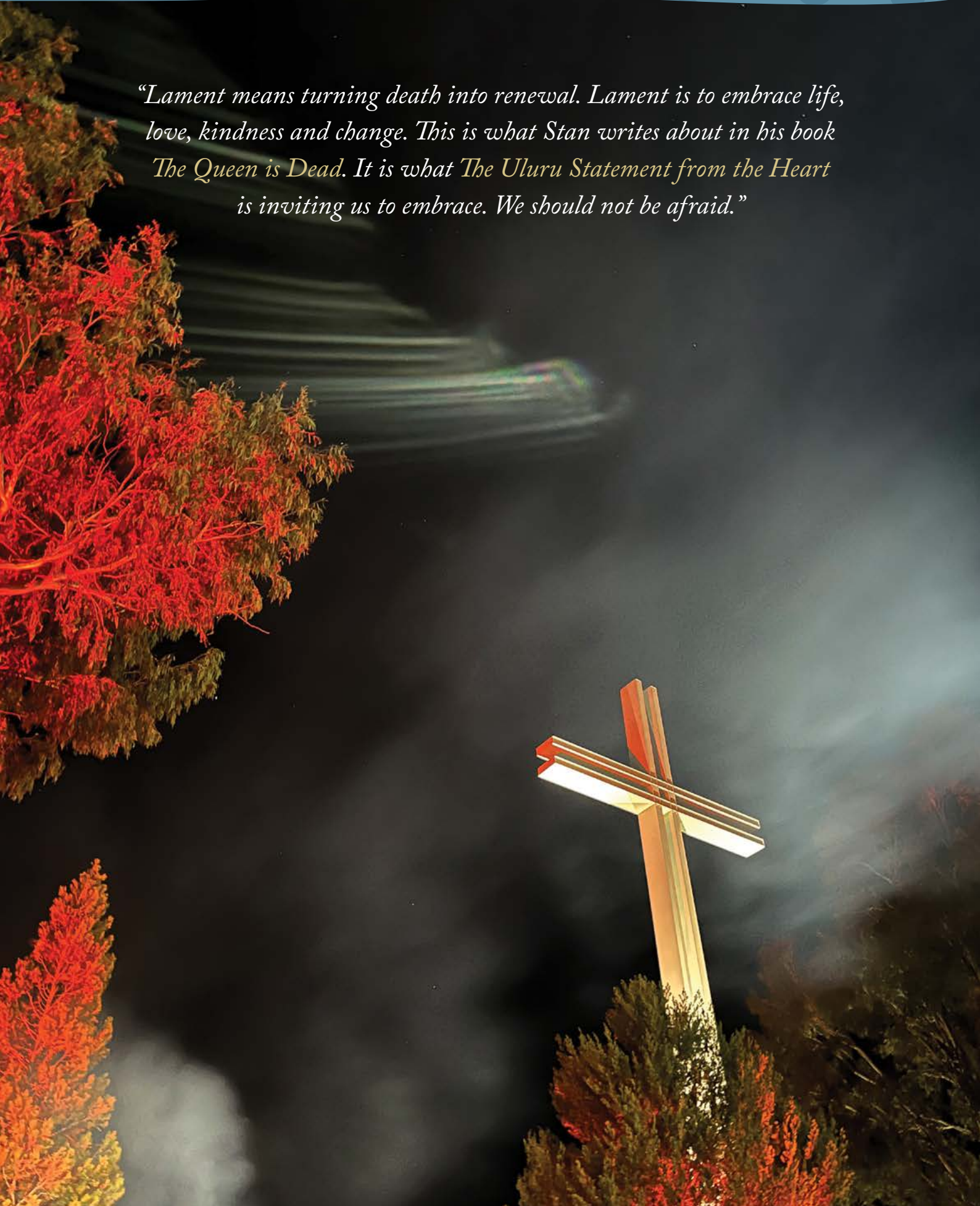
*Following the conversation as we moved to enjoy refreshments and to purchase our books a group of women, A Chorus of Women, encircled Stan to sing 'Lament'. The women's wish was to gift this song and the emotion it invokes, which they have been singing for 20 years, to Stan.*

*I'm on a bus, heading to Sydney to begin a week of adventure exploring the Red Centre based on the outskirts of Alice Springs. I'm taking The Queen is Dead with me.*

A Chorus of Women actively sings up the voice of the people, what they believe to be in the heart of the people. 'Lament' was their first song. Lament means turning death into renewal. 'Lament' is to embrace life, love, kindness and change. This is what Stan writes about in his book, *The Queen is Dead*. It is what *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* is inviting us to embrace. We should not be afraid.



*“Lament means turning death into renewal. Lament is to embrace life, love, kindness and change. This is what Stan writes about in his book *The Queen is Dead*. It is what *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* is inviting us to embrace. We should not be afraid.”*



The Great Cross at dusk in May, photo by Sarah Stitt

## *Putting Burdens on Broken Shoulders* by Ken Crispin

**Review by Clive Rodger**

**Executive Board Member, ACC&C**

On 16 May in the Chambers Pavilion of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture the Hon Dr Ken Crispin KC's book *Putting Burdens on Broken Shoulders: Divorce and Remarriage are not Unforgivable Sins* was launched by Justice Shane Gill of the Family Division of the Federal Court. There were many colleagues and legal luminaries present.

In 2021 there were 56,244 divorces in Australia, the biggest number since 1976. The pandemic put a huge strain on marriages. The average longevity of marriage prior to divorce has increased to 12 years (in 2019) from 11 years in 1999.

Divorce brings much heartache, trauma, animosity, financial insecurity and, for children, considerable disruption. It is a time when people need support, love, care, affirmation and often the rebuilding of lives and financial resources. Churches and Christian communities should be places of hospitality, sanctuary, emotional and practical support.

Ken Crispin's book looks at the advice given to many people facing divorce or being divorced by conservative Christian ministers and many Catholic priests that divorce is a sin, marriage a sacred sacrament that cannot or should not be broken.

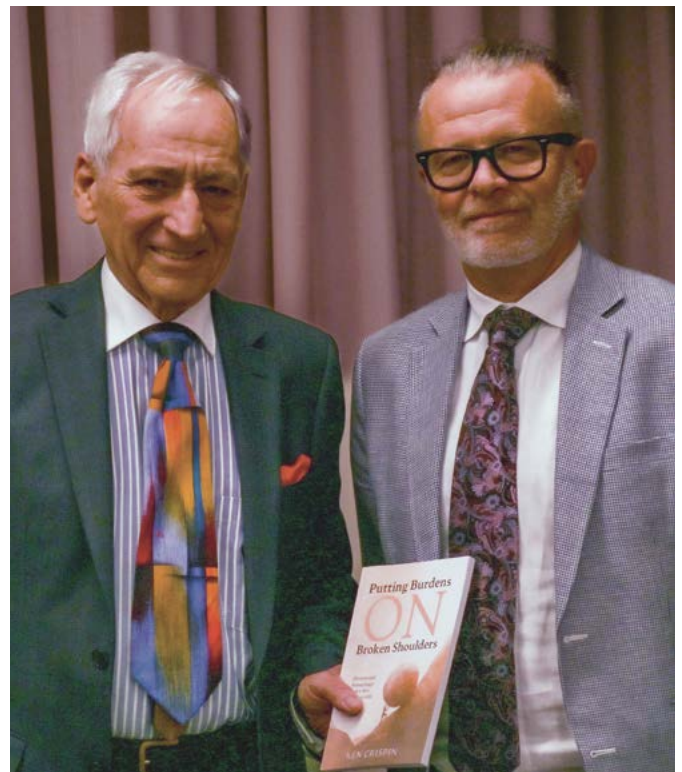
Dr Crispin is a distinguished Australian lawyer and former President of the ACT Court of Appeal. He completed a Doctorate in Legal Ethics. He Chaired the ACT Law Reform Commission for a decade and still holds the position of Commissioner for Standards for the ACT Government. As part of his legal career he has represented people before the Court with respect to divorce and family law. "I always knew which of my clients were the Christians," he said, "They were the ones burdened with guilt and very painful shame."

*Putting Burdens on Broken Shoulders* is a pastorally sensitive book, written by a fine legal and ethically trained mind. Dr Crispin critically examines the relevant biblical texts that some fundamentalist Christian teachers and leaders use to aver that divorce and/or remarriage is a sin and unacceptable to God. He also examines the Catholic view of marriage as an unbreakable covenant. Dr Crispin carefully reviews the biblical texts and reveals there are basic errors of reading and logic and theological misconceptions which are deeply entrenched in tradition. In looking at the Gospels, Dr Crispin states that Jesus saw marriage as a relationship formed when a man leaves his mother and father and cleaves to his wife and they become

one flesh. Divorce means the breaking of that relationship. Marriage is a relationship: like all relationships there remains the possibility it can be broken. Jesus acknowledges this.

Dr Crispin's book is important reading for anyone facing divorce or who still experiences guilt or shame in being divorced. It is well researched by a highly experienced forensic legal (not legalistic) mind. It is comprehensive in its biblical analysis. It argues that, properly understood, the relevant biblical passages do not lock people into intolerable situations. A biblical understanding of faithfulness does not mandate abuse, isolation, unwanted separation from a partner in the marital relationships of Christians. Christians are also called to embrace and support broken lives and broken hearts. It is not the role of Christians to compound the tragedy of a marriage breakdown and its accompanying losses by adding to the burdens on those already straining under the broken shoulders of theological condemnation.

*Dr Crispin's book is available through Booktopia or through Amazon for Kindle readers.*



Hon Dr Ken Crispin KC and Justice Shane Gill, photo by Liz Jakimow



## ► Upcoming Events

**"It has to speak" 70 Not Out! - no. 2. David Pereira**  
1pm, The Chapel

3  
SEPT



**"People like a tune they can whistle" 70 Not Out! - no. 3. David Pereira**  
1pm, The Chapel

24  
SEPT



**Stephen Pickard "Restoring the Authentic Voice for the Church"**  
7pm, Chambers Pavilion

12  
OCT



**"I'm forbidden to see" 70 Not Out! - no. 4. David Pereira**  
1pm, The Chapel

29  
OCT



**"Meditations" 70 Not Out! - no. 5. David Pereira**  
1pm, The Chapel

5  
NOV



**ANSD Quiet Day with Rev Dr Neil Millar**  
8.30am - 4pm  
Chambers Pavilion

25  
NOV



**Spiritus Short Film Prize evenings**  
Canberra Dendy Cinema  
3pm 12 Nov, 25 Nov TBC

12 & 25  
Nov



**A Chorus of Women 20th Anniversary**  
The Chapel

3  
DEC



**"Blown away" 70 Not Out! - no. 6. David Pereira**  
1pm, The Chapel

10  
DEC



## Hire the Centre's facilities for your next event

The Centre's facilities include The Chapel, which can host up to 200 people seated, and The Chambers Pavilion which can seat 50 people. There is free onsite parking for event attendees. We welcome inquiries from groups that run events that are consistent with the vision of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. Contact Sarah Stitt and Lauren Bartley for more information email [acc-c@csu.edu.au](mailto:acc-c@csu.edu.au)



THE CHAPEL



THE CHAMBERS PAVILION





Detail, Mural Wall, ACC&C. Original painting by Hector Jandany depicting the *Holy Spirit in our Land* is held in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR  
**CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE**  
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD