The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

ENGAGE

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The value of hope

by Bishop Mark Short

Great Cross, photo by Liz Jakimow.

Cover image: Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) at the Bible Gardens, photo by Sarah Stitt

Contents

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AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, photo by Liz Jakimow

Editorial

Meg Richens

Interim Executive Director

Sometimes it is hard to tell if we live in the most or least connected time in history. While technology connects us, enables us to research information at the push of a button and to participate in discussions and debates across vast distances, it also allows us to isolate ourselves, to see "connection" as being the same regardless of whether it is in person or online. Electronic connection can be a boon for the isolated, shut in or unwell, but it can be isolating for those who might otherwise make connections face to face, socially, at work or with family. Technology can allow us to be disembodied, a random voice from the ether, rather than the embodied humans that we are, connected to a physical reality that we cannot entirely escape.

Christianity is often said to be an embodied faith. In this case, embodiment means active expression of our faith through thoughts, words and actions. It means studying, understanding and actively implementing the principles and values of this faith that connects us to the world and to each other.

At the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, we believe in building communities where all of creation flourishes. It is our way of living out an embodied Christianity, where Christian values are consciously applied to the ways we live, work and play.

It is wonderful then to see so many examples of people living out their faith in the world in this issue of Engage. There is Majorie Lemin, whose tireless work in the Braidwood community, was recently acknowledged when she was awarded Braidwood Citizen of the Year. There is the wonderful work done by Pastor Julie Connah and the team at St Margaret's Uniting Church in Hackett bringing much needed services to the local community. Lisa Wriley talks about how her Quaker faith has urged her to work towards sustainable practices, and Sally Shaw gives an account of the creative workshop she runs helping people think about Christian faith and creation care.

In this year of Hope2025, Bishop Mark Short reminds us of the importance of that "disruptive" hope that often underpins our work towards social justice. Dr Ruth Powell talks about the strengths of the more than 10,500 Christian congregations around Australia and the benefits they bring both to the people within them and to the wider society. Taking a more historical approach, Professor Wayne Hudson discusses the contributions of Christianity to Australian society. We also hear from Rev'd Ben Soderlund and Professor Scott Cowdell on what embodiment means to them.

I hope that this issue inspires you to think about the ways in which hope, faith and love can empower us all to build community – to bring hope to and for the whole of creation, even in these troubled times, so that together we can build a positive, supportive, encouraging future.

Tribute to Ann Skamp *(28 July 1950 – 24 February 2025)*

Clive Rodger

Former Chair of Christians for an Ethical Society & former ACC&C Board Member

Anyone who met Ann Skamp would remember her warm and penetrating eyes and wide smile. Ann was a special and gifted person who died at the end of February 2025. She was a friend, a wise counsel, a passionate advocate for women, a pioneer of lay women in leadership roles in the Anglican Communion, an activist and doer and encourager. Her deep Christian commitment was manifest in her fights to overcome injustice and in striving for the common good.

After 43 years in Lismore, Ann and Keith decided to move to Canberra. Our community was the beneficiary of that decision. I remember Bishop George Browning, who then chaired Christians for an Ethical Society (CES), saying that Ann would make an excellent Secretary for CES. How right he was. Ann served CES with competence, dedication, wisdom, discernment and friendship. She provided informed advice to the Committee, used her extensive contacts in the church, and through her wide reading and engagement with the critical issues facing society provided excellent suggestions about topics and speakers for our CES Forums.

Ann wasn't just a joiner of committees. She energised them. She was a doer and an activist. Her faith inspired her to action. Where she saw injustice she sought to do something about it. She in fact embodied what CES stands for: helping others frame Christian behaviours and responses to the critical issues facing society. She gave the Committee energy and capacity.

Her list of involvements in the Anglican Church is outstanding. Ann was Secretary to the Grafton Synod and served on its Bishop in Council. She was a lay Canon in the Grafton Cathedral, a member of the NSW Provincial Synod. She served for almost two decades on the General Synod Standing Committee and almost as long on its Executive Committee. In these key roles her advocacy for women was always strong. She was a founding member of the International Anglican Women's Network, which she represented at the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women.

The Rev Dr Brian Douglas in his funeral address for Ann's funeral held at All Saints Ainslie on 3 March stated that "Ann's love of God was a dynamic and living relationship, not some rules-based order but one that was real and realistic, open and questioning, strong and luminous."

Ann was associated with the ACC&C as well as CES. She served as Secretary for the CES Committee for almost a decade. Her contribution was enormous and greatly valued. Her encouragement was always welcome and her wisdom sought. Most however I will miss Ann as a friend, a colleague in Christ, a companion in the ministry of the church and as an advocate for social justice.

Vale Ann Skamp dear friend. We miss you.

Ann wasn't just a joiner of committees. She energised them. She was a doer and an activist. Her faith inspired her to action. Where she saw injustice she sought to do something about it. She in fact embodied what CES stands for: helping others frame Christian behaviours and responses to the critical issues facing society.

Ann Skamp, photo provided by Keith Skamp

The value of hope

Bishop Mark Short

Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn

Between Easter and Pentecost this year Anglican Dioceses across Australia will be sharing in a season of outreach called Hope25, during which we will be sharing with our communities the hope that Jesus offers in an uncertain world (see www.hope25.com.au for further details). That uncertainty operates at many different levels – environmental, economic and political. There is also the everyday experience of being fallible human beings unable to control or predict our own future. I was reminded of this recently when a stubborn kidney stone disrupted the preparation of this article.

In preparation for Hope25 I've been reading *The Spirit of Hope* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), a new book by the South Korean Roman Catholic Philosopher Byung-Chul Han.

Han contrasts hope with a shallow and naïve optimism which he believes serves the interest of consumption in a neo-liberal capitalist economy. For Han hope has three essential characteristics:

- hope is passionate. "Hope also has intensity. It represents a deep prayer of the soul, a passion that awakens in the face of despair's negativity." p8
- hope is communal and relational. "Anxiety radically narrows the field of possibilities and this makes it harder to gain access to the new, to the not-yet-existing. For this reason, it is opposed to hope, which sharpens the sense of possibility and kindles the passion for the new, for the wholly other." p78
- hope is active. "The conventional criticism of hope ignores its complexity and inner tensions. Hope goes far beyond passive expectations and wishes … Inherent in it is a determination to act." p23

The longing and need for hope is a universal human experience. Yet, as Han describes there is a particular Christian hope. He quotes Ernst Bloch, "Always the Christian hope has had a revolutionary effect in this sense on the intellectual history of the society affected by it." p37

Central to the revolutionary impact of Christian hope is its vision of the present and coming kingdom of God. This is a vision which both affirms the goodness of the created order and looks forward to its transformation and liberation from the effects of human wrong-doing. It's a vision that looks forward to the mighty being pulled down from their positions of power and the humble being lifted up in their place, a season where in the lyrics of Bob Dylan "the loser now will be later to win." It's also a vision in which this world's true King is revealed to be the One who gave His life for its redemption.

It's this disruptive hope, sometimes unrecognised and unacknowledged, which has inspired many movements for justice, from the US civil rights movement, the struggle for post-colonial independence and the campaign for First Nations recognition and justice in Australia. It is at least one of the reasons why we expect our political leaders to be agents of hope and not mere preservers of the status quo.

Of course hope can be disappointed. It is tragic when this occurs, especially when the reason for this lies with the failure of Christians and churches to express and embody this hope. The year 2025 is as good a time as any to recommit to embedding this value and virtue at the heart of our common life.

HOPE25
HOPE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

For more information about Hope25, go to hope25.com.au

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Reaching upwards, photo by Liz Jakimow

Interview with Dr Catherine de Fontenay, Productivity Commissioner

Liz Jakimow
Communications Officer, ACC&C

Dr Catherine de Fontenay

You are currently a Commissioner of the Productivity Commission (PC). What does the Productivity Commission do and why is it important?

The Productivity Commission is a small research body inside the federal government. Essentially, we cover all aspects of microeconomics and international trade, in addition to our work on the Closing the Gap agreements. That gives us an extremely broad remit, particularly as economics has started to be applied to an ever-broader set of spheres. We answer questions from the government that they put to us in the form of inquiries, but we also initiate our own research. Microeconomics touches every part of life, so it means that the work is very diverse and really interesting.

What are some of the influences that have shaped your career? What drew you to economics?

When I was young, maybe around 10, I felt very drawn to serve in developing countries. Initially I wanted to be a missionary. There was a stage when I wanted to be a doctor, but biology classes put an end to that. Then I thought I might want to be an agricultural engineer, but the agriculture campus was 30km away from everything else. I think I was searching for a set of tools that could make a difference to people in developing countries. Economics seemed a useful tool for analysing situations and figuring out how we could improve outcomes for people.

What have been some of the highlights of your career?

I've really enjoyed teaching, that chance to influence young people. In Australia there's somewhat of a jaded approach to universities, particularly among undergraduates. Some of them have had a frustrating experience with universities. People would come into development economics with this jaded outlook. It was so much fun to tap into their true desire to really care for people in developing countries and to work out how we can best support them. I also really enjoy teaching MBAs; they're often bright, fascinating people doing important work in their roles in the private sector. A lot of them have never encountered economics before. It is fun to tap into their excitement at discovering these tools and learning how they can use them in their work.

According to the Productivity Commission's website, Australia's productivity performance ranks as 16th out of 24 OECD countries. What do you think are some of the reasons for it ranking 16th? And is there anything that can be done to improve this?

Around the world there has been a slowdown in productivity and that is something lots of countries are worried about. Researchers have focused on the slowdown in "business dynamism" as a big contributor: There is less firm entry. There is less firm exit. There are a smaller number of firms with a lot of market power. There's less investment. There are fewer people changing jobs. So researchers worry that perhaps firms have too much market power and this creates barriers to new firms getting into the market. I'm not sure that the evidence is definitive in Australia. But we are a smaller market and have a small number of firms in a lot of industries, so that could be contributing to some of our challenges. Why the productivity slowdown has been so pronounced here is hard to answer.

One possible reason is that in the 1990s, there were a lot of very important reforms, which gave a significant boost to the economy. That impetus for reform has stalled, possibly due to our federal structures. At the time the federal government agreed with the states on important reforms. Some of those reforms meant there would be less state revenue, even if there was more government revenue overall. The federal government supported the states to undertake some of those reforms. That was a productive interaction at that time. But there's a risk that it has led to a less productive interaction, in the long term, if states won't undertake reforms without significant federal contribution. That said, it's worth acknowledging that the states and the Commonwealth continue to negotiate agreements to promote reform.

Does your Christian faith have any impact on your role as Commissioner of the Productivity Commission?

I think our Christian faith always has an impact on any role that we do. It's part of why I want to do this work and I view it as a great privilege and a great responsibility, getting to do research that impacts on the wellbeing of all Australians. It's certainly a big motivation for wanting to be involved in policy work. And

I think my Christian faith makes me more aware of the plight of the disadvantaged. I was keen to be involved in the PC's research on inequality, mobility, and entrenched poverty.

However, it's important for us not to impose too much of our own values in our work, but to give government the right to make decisions about what policies are implemented. We can make them more aware of the pitfalls or potential benefits of a particular policy; but we need to be careful not to usurp the role of government.

Is the gap between rich and poor growing larger? And should we be concerned about wealth inequality, both as members of Australian society and, more specifically, as Christians?

Income inequality has been rising a little bit steadily over the years. With wealth inequality, it's a little harder to be certain but reliable studies suggest that it has also been gradually rising. I think we do need to be concerned about that as Christians. We know that, once inequality gets to be large, that has some damaging impacts on people. It can mean that life is extremely hard and full of despair for those who are at the bottom of the distribution. It can limit opportunities for people to advance. There is a connection between inequality and mobility. High inequality countries are also low mobility countries. That is of real concern to us.

It also has a negative impact on people that are privileged. If they perceive people who are less privileged as fundamentally different to them, there's a loss of feeling of commonality and of trying to help each other. As a Christian, I look out for those signs that we are understanding each other less and able to relate to each other less. We need to be worried about those, both economically and spiritually.

In what ways do you think theology and economics can dialogue? The bible says a lot about economics – but is it still relevant for us today?

There are definitely lots of opportunities for dialogue. As with all parts of life, what we see in the bible is a huge challenge to the ways we normally go about things, when we live without reflecting and without trying to be transformed into the image of Christ. I've personally always been challenged by the concept of years of Jubilee in the book of Leviticus. The law given by God was that, every 50 years, every family should recover their land that they may have needed to sell because of economic distress or because of other reasons. Essentially it's allowing the market economy to run, but then every 50 years, we level out the asset base all over again.

It's a fascinating topic for economists because markets have some amazing properties when people start off with a similar asset base that they really don't have in other circumstances. If we all start out with a similar level of purchasing power and we let markets run, we get something called allocative efficiency. Goods and services will go to the people who value them the most. If I care more about nice restaurants and you care more about bicycles, I'll end up spending my money on nice restaurants and you'll spend your money on bicycles. But if I'm in a market with Bill Gates, Bill will get all of the goods and services that he chooses to purchase, because his purchasing power is much greater than mine. We don't get allocative efficiency if we don't have a comparable asset base. So it's an interesting reason for undertaking some redistribution in our economy that we don't really see mentioned that much elsewhere.

How can economics help the church?

I think economics should stay out of the church. And most fields of business should stay out; some of Organisational Behaviour could be usefully incorporated into ministry training, but it would need to be carefully interpreted by theologians. The church should not behave like a corporation and not treat the parishioners as inputs. If we think of a modern corporation, its workers are essentially inputs. Some of those corporations care for the wellbeing of their workers, but mainly as a way of motivating those workers to achieve their goals as a firm.

The church cannot have that perspective. The members of a church are always an end, in and of itself. We are not a means to an end. All Christians long for other people to come to know Jesus and all of us want to be part of that work. But God is also interested in my sanctification and me hanging on to my faith. So the church can never treat me as simply a means to reaching other people with the gospel.

At the moment, Christianity has declined. Should we think about it as a numbers game and trying to increase our market share?

No. I think if we hold on to our true distinctiveness and the amazing message we have in the gospel, the Church will have an impact. If we think of the start of Christianity, nothing could have been less promising. They were a fringe group from a hated occupied nation within the Roman Empire. The earlier followers were slaves and women and groups that were not valued in society and it ended up transforming the entire world. That's because of their distinctiveness, their willingness to be radical with their goods and their lives and to hold onto the full truth of the Christian message.

The reason we don't have as much impact now is we seek to have it both ways, to live comfortable, worldly lives and at the same time to say we hold onto our faith. We have an amazing alternative to the world to offer, but it's easy to fall into looking exactly the same as everyone else.

Strengths of local faith communities

Dr Ruth Powell

Director, National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Research

There are more than 10,500 Christian congregations across Australia, plus congregations of other religions. In fact, there are more local congregations than any other organisations which are embedded within local communities. This includes schools, service stations or post offices.

This article provides a brief overview of the strengths of these local faith communities, based on various research studies conducted by National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Research. As well as being sources of social capital, congregations generally amplify the experience of people of faith who are involved in them. Our research has found that congregations act as sources of social capital, and compared to all Australians:

- People of faith experience higher levels of social cohesion;
- People of faith are more likely to have higher civic engagement; and
- People of faith have higher levels of wellbeing.

Data sources for these findings are, first, from Australian Community Surveys (ACS) run by NCLS Research, which provide a picture of social attitudes, religion, spirituality, and wellbeing in Australian communities. The ACS is a sample of Australian adults with quotas based on the age, gender and location of the whole population. Second, findings come from the National Church Life Survey, a study of Christian congregations (or churches), their local leaders and attenders, which has been running for more than 30 years. Further details about these data sources are described at the end of this article.

Congregations act as sources of social capital

In sociological terms, congregations operate as sources of social capital, both in the form of bonding between participants as well as bridging capital. Congregations provide religious worship services and support for those on a journey of faith, seeking meaning and purpose. They offer a place to belong. They also provide social services. Eight in 10 local churches are estimated to have provided or run social services or social action activities in the previous 12 months. Beyond Australian shores 86% of churches have had a specific commitment, through relational or financial support, to people in developing countries over the past 12 months.

People of faith experience higher levels of social cohesion.

The Scanlon Foundation has invested in tracking social cohesion in Australia over many years. There are five domains of social cohesion in their framework: belonging, social inclusion and justice, participation, acceptance and rejection, and worth. The latest result on the Social Cohesion index is the lowest score on record since 2007. The baseline set for the Index in 2007 was 100 points and it is now sitting at 78. (Note that a score of 78 remains a high measure of cohesion for a nation). (https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024)

Studies run by NCLS Research of the wider community have also found high levels of social cohesion overall. Over time there have been consistent positive responses to questions about national life and personal satisfaction. In general, multicultural policies have been seen in positive terms.

In an analysis which compared church attenders with all Australians, we found that church attendance was significantly positively related to higher social cohesion across all five domains: belonging, worth, participation, social justice/equity and acceptance.

In sociological terms, congregations operate as sources of social capital, both in the form of bonding between participants as well as bridging capital. Congregations provide religious worship services and support for those on a journey of faith, seeking meaning and purpose. They offer a place to belong.

Why might church attenders have higher levels of social cohesion? Using sociological tools, explanatory factors may be social, demographic, economic, religious etc. Perhaps it is due to the stronger relational ties that come with group involvement. Perhaps the demographic profile of attenders as older and having higher education and income levels equates with them being more established. Church attenders are economically conservative, while also socially progressive with regard to tolerance of diversity. Perhaps their religious beliefs positively influence self-worth and acceptance of "the other" eg migrants/refugees.

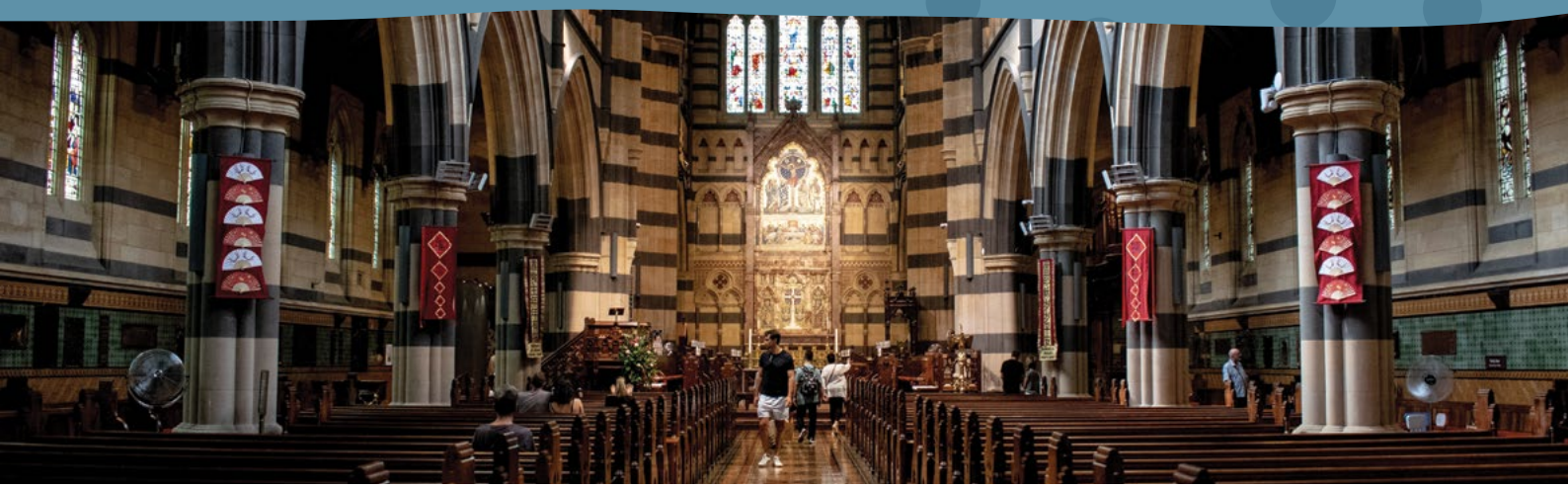


Photo by Liz Jakimow

People of faith are more likely to participate in civic engagement

Church attenders are more likely than all Australians to be volunteers through formal organisations. They are also more engaged on an informal level. Using both NCLS and ACS results, we have found that church attenders were significantly likely to offer informal help to others, compared to all Australians. This includes donating money to charities, lending or giving money or possessions outside the family, helping someone in crisis, helping the sick, and also advocacy, such as contacting a politician about a public issue.

People of faith have higher levels of wellbeing

There is a lot of research evidence that religious beliefs affect subjective well-being, generally in a positive way. Psychological studies find that religious people are generally happier than non-religious people, irrespective of their faith. Further, people with strong religious beliefs tend to experience higher levels of life satisfaction than those with weaker religious beliefs. Regular engagement in religious activities appears to be positively related to well-being.

Our analysis of the ACS supports the findings from many other studies. Australians who identify as Christian or "Religious and Spiritual" have higher levels of life satisfaction on average, than other Australians. Christians who attend church had the highest average scores. More research work needs to be done to disentangle what factors might drive these differences.

In summary, faith communities can and do play a positive role in people's lives with a range of benefits that flow. The research evidence highlights:

- Higher social cohesion across all domains
- Higher levels of civic engagement, both collective and informal/individual
- Higher levels of subjective wellbeing.

Congregations offer significant sources of social capital to Australian society.

About the data sources

The Australian Community Survey (ACS)

The Australian Community Survey (ACS) provides a picture of social attitudes, religion, spirituality, and wellbeing in Australian communities. It has been run on 10 occasions from 1998 to 2024. In recent years we have aimed for an annual survey wave to track changes more closely. Our most recent wave was collected in May 2024 from a large online research panel of Australians managed by Online Research Unit (ORU). It is a representative sample of adults on age, gender and location. The dataset is weighted to reflect the demographic profile of the Australian population aged 18+ on age, gender and education.

About the National Church Life Survey

The Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a study of Christian congregations (or churches), their local leaders and attenders which has been running for more than 30 years. This is now the largest, longest running survey of religious congregations in the world. The most recent research was done in 2021 and 2022 and we have information from around 125,000 attenders and leaders in more than 3,000 congregations in 22 Christian denominations and movements.

About Dr Ruth Powell

My research over the past three decades has primarily been focused on Australia's spiritual landscape and Christian congregational studies. It is a focus on contemporary, lived religion, with practical application. My primary disciplines are sociology and social psychology, with an emphasis on quantitative methodologies, as well as some qualitative studies.

www.ncls.org.au

We cannot escape embodiment

Scott Cowdell

Research Professor, Centre for Religion Ethics and Society (CRES)

We are bodies, yes, and persons with bodies. Our personhood has an embodied, material foundation: animal, vegetable and mineral. This personhood inhabits its bodiliness, being formed by it and manifest through it. Think of those many muscles enabling the facial expressions that are indispensable for humans belonging together, or the brain evolution that shaped us for language and hence for distinctively human life in community. And think of the way bodies are universally though variously displayed, decorated and dressed to express personhood and to conform our selves to the demands of group belonging.

The disorders of personhood are all painfully manifest in the body, from depression to heartbrokenness to addictions and gender dysphorias. Yet the theological word "grace" is also properly applied to bodies. We see this grace in breathtaking moments of sporting prowess, in sublime musical performance, and in the beauties of dance—from the ballet stage to the Olympic ice rink. There is also the embodied sacrament of personhood that sexual intimacy represents; as John Donne put it in his poem "The Ecstasy."

> *"Love's mysteries in souls do grow. But yet the body is his book."*

So, we human persons cannot escape our embodiment. Though we have tried to do so. There is a stubborn Christian legacy of downplaying and denying the body in favour of the soul, rooted in Greek philosophy and in plain denial of the Hebrew Scriptures. Modern philosophy, too, since Descartes and Kant, has taken the embodied mind out of the world in various ways. Yet theology today, especially in its so-called phenomenological turn, and with the increasing prominence of theological anthropology, has sought to recover the theological significance of embodiment. This has been aided by the fighting return of embodiment to epistemology in more recent continental philosophy.

The body's inescapability ought to be obvious for Christians given the centrality of Jesus's incarnation, the sacraments and the Church in Christian thought. We only know God within the limits and by the means that God willingly embraces—humans only know God humanly, if you like, because embodied human life, blessed forever by Jesus, is the context in which God most typically chooses to meet us. Jesus's divine personhood was made manifest within the ordinariness of human embodiment, without importing extra divine features. This is what the Formula of Chalcedon was at pains to affirm with its insistence that Jesus's divine and human natures were not subject to "confusion."

The resurrection of Jesus is not the abandonment of his embodiment, as the Gospel narratives of his resurrection appearances make plain. Christ risen from the dead is revealed from heaven among his disciples in their world of bodies, experienced as newly but still recognisably embodied. Hence, we need not expect that the life of heaven will somehow bring an end to the relationality and self-expression that are inseparable from our being embodied. As our bodies from infancy to maturity, in tandem with our personhood, experience a flux of changeful continuity, so we can imagine that our bodies resurrected in God's nearer presence will remain reliable vectors of our personhood, though carried forward into a new, redeemed state of life. Accordingly, the risen Christ, and Mary with him, the saints and one day all of us, will share the life of heaven humanly, personally related to one another in continuity with our current embodied state. Though with new structures and capacities reflecting the fulfillment of creation in God's new creation.

In the meantime, there is the redeemed life of the body to be lived by Christians here on earth, in what St Paul was bold enough to see as Christ's new ecclesial body. The Church's sacraments, too, express the fundamentally anti-gnostic conviction of orthodox Christianity: that God meets Christians through our bodily action together, using ready-to-hand objects and embodied commitments. From the lifetime bodily investment of married couples and ordained priests, to the elements of bread and wine, water, oil and the laying on of hands, the Church receives God's presence and promises. Hence the sacraments are truly what French theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet calls "the word of God at the mercy of the body."

Christ Appears on the Shore of Lake Tiberias, James Tissot, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

So, we human persons cannot escape our embodiment. Though we have tried to do so. There is a stubborn Christian legacy of downplaying and denying the body in favour of the soul, rooted in Greek philosophy and in plain denial of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Photo by Liz Jakimow

Multifaith Commonwealth Day Celebration

Liz Jakimow

Communications Officer, ACC&C

Held ever year on Canberra Day, the Multifaith Commonwealth Day Celebration is always a joyous and colourful event. With the theme of "personal and community resilience," this year was no exception.

Prior to the service, the Papua New Guinea Peroveta Singers of Canberra delighted everyone with their wonderful singing. Then the bell was rung in recognition of the 56 member states of the Commonwealth. The Fijian Lali drums welcomed everyone to the Chapel.

Hosted by Richard Refshauge AM, board member of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, there was also a message from His Majesty King Charles III, read by Her Excellency, the Governor-General Sam Mostyn AC, who then provided her own reflection. A message from the Prime Minister, the Honourable Anthony Albanese MP was read by Mr David Smith MP. There were also reflections on the theme from the Honourable Professor Matthew Neuhaus, President of the Royal Commonwealth Society ACT, and Kantilal Jinna OAM MoF, Convenor of the Commonwealth Day Celebration Committee.

Representatives from different faiths presented statements, including Ms Shephalie Williams representing Bahá'i, the Venerable Tenpa Bejanke Duime representing Buddhism, Miss Rebecca Langworthy representing Christianity, Dr Shanti Reddy representing Hinduism, Mr Muhammed Sadru (Dean) Sahu Khan representing Islam, Ms Anni Ajmera representing Jainism, Rabbi Shimon Eddi representing the Jewish faith and Mr Dilmohan Singh representing Sikhism.

Cultural performances included the Canberra Men's Choir, the African Community Catholic Choir, the Canberra Tongan Language and Performing Arts School and the Knights of Bhangra. Following the ceremony, people gathered outside for a light lunch, while Isaac Cotter AM JP and his family entertained everyone with their music. The Governor-General stayed to talk with the various cultural groups and faith representatives, posing for photos and even taking a few selfies!

Photo supplied by the Governor-General's office

Embodiment in the Christian Gospel, ministry and growth

Rev'd Ben Soderlund

Lead Minister, Good Shepherd Anglican Church, Barton

Our culture is becoming disembodied. Advances in internet technology and the social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have rapidly accelerated our tendency to connect through means other than face-to-face, in-person community. Yet our existence in physical bodies and the limits that come from our embodiment are a part of God's good design for human beings and vital to our physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Therefore, it should be no surprise that our embodiment is fundamental to the Christian Church's identity and mission.

Christ's Gospel is Embodied

Indeed, the entirety of Christ's ministry can be viewed through the lens of embodiment. This ministry of embodiment is displayed throughout the Church's major gospel festivals, through which we remember God's embodiment of himself so that embodied human beings may once again live in his holy presence.

Starting with Christmas, we celebrate the incarnation, where "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14), and the astonishing fact that the unlimited God limited himself to a human body to be physically present with his people. As an embodied human being, Jesus walked, talked, touched and ate with the people to whom he ministered.

On Good Friday, commemorating Christ's crucifixion, we remember that Jesus suffered and died physically on the cross and that "he himself bore our sins in his body" (1 Pe 2:24). Yet also, by the merits of Christ's passion, our human flesh is cleansed of sin, as when God "by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (Ro 8:3).

On Easter Day, we rejoice in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection was not a mere spiritual renewal. Jesus rose in his physical human body. Thus, the risen Christ still bore the scars of the crucifixion on his hands and his feet, and he physically walked, talked, touched and ate with his disciples (Lk 24:13-49 & Jn 20:24-29). As Jesus assured his friends, "It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Lk 24:39).

At Ascension, we remember that Jesus has ascended "into heaven and is at the right hand of God" (1 Pe 3:21). The stunning implication that the Christ who took on human flesh now sits on the throne of God can be easily missed: an embodied human being is now in heaven! This is the great Christian hope: where the human Jesus now is, his human people can now follow.

Our assurance of this hope is Pentecost, when the ascended Christ poured the Holy Spirit onto his Church and gave us "his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2 Co 1:22). Thus, the new heavenly reality for embodied human beings has already begun within the Church, as God the Holy Spirit now lives within the flesh of every follower of Jesus. And "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Ro 8:11).

The Church's Ministry is Embodied

Furthermore, just as Christ's ministry is embodied, so is the ministry of his Church. Our worship is embodied. Christian worship requires people to physically meet with one another in the name of Jesus, "for where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Mt 18:20). Hence, the injunction from the author of Hebrews for Christians to not be "neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some" (Hb 10:25).

Our preaching is embodied. A sermon's message and power cannot be separated from the humanity of its preacher. Listeners do not just hear God speaking through a sermon's content but also through the preacher's embodied person. As Episcopalian Bishop Phillip Brooks famously concluded, "preaching is the bringing of truth through personality."

Our sacraments are embodied. The water of Baptism and the bread and wine of the Eucharist must be seen, heard, felt, smelt and tasted by our physical bodies. In Augustine's words, they are an "outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace." God is pleased to strengthen our souls through his invisible grace when, in faith, our bodies receive his visible signs of washing and feeding.

Good Shepherd Service, photo supplied by author

Our mission is embodied. The Church's ministries of justice and mercy cannot easily be separated from human bodies and face-to-face communication, whether serving the needs of others, pursuing peace and reconciliation, or helping to safeguard the integrity of the physical creation. Effective evangelism and discipleship typically require the proclamation of the gospel through in-person friendship.

The Church's Growth is Embodied

Thus, it is no coincidence that one of the most effective ways of fostering Church growth in our increasingly disembodied culture has been through planting new Churches. Church planting is simply the forming of new Christian congregations to gather in new locations. These planted congregations, alongside the mission of existing Churches in their town or city, seek new ways to present to their community what it is most hungry for: the embodied gospel of Jesus through the embodied ministry of the Church.

Planting a new Church on the grounds of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture has been a testament to this enduring model. It has brought together a new community of believers who gather to worship, minister and grow in faith as a new, embodied congregation.

The most joyful moments in our journey so far have been the baptisms celebrated at the ACC&C's baptismal fountain at the foot of the Great Cross. These baptisms celebrate the faith of new families and new believers and embody God's grace, making it visible to the world through the lives of his people.

As disembodied interactions increasingly shape our lives, the Christian emphasis on physical presence reminds us of the great gift of human embodiment. To quote Augustine again, "The Word was made flesh ... to that flesh the Church is joined, and so there is made the whole Christ, Head, and body." As followers of Jesus, we are called to live out this truth in our worship, ministry and mission, sharing Christ's embodied hope with a culture yearning for true connection and community.

Ben serves as a Priest in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and is a Doctoral candidate at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston. Before ordination, Ben worked as an Economist in the public sector. He and his wife Rowan lead Good Shepherd Barton. This new congregation was planted in 2024, initially meeting at St Mark's National Theological Centre and now in the Chapel of the ACC&C

The most joyful moments in our journey so far have been the baptisms celebrated at the ACC&C's baptismal fountain at the foot of the Great Cross. These baptisms celebrate the faith of new families and new believers and embody God's grace, making it visible to the world through the lives of his people.

Baptism at the Great Cross, photo supplied by author

Braidwood's Citizen of the Year

Marjorie Lemin

Braidwood Citizen of the Year

My Australia Day long weekend was always a busy time, overseeing a large Book Fair which is held in Braidwood twice a year. The weekend usually came and went in a flurry of books. Outside activities were the last thing on my mind.

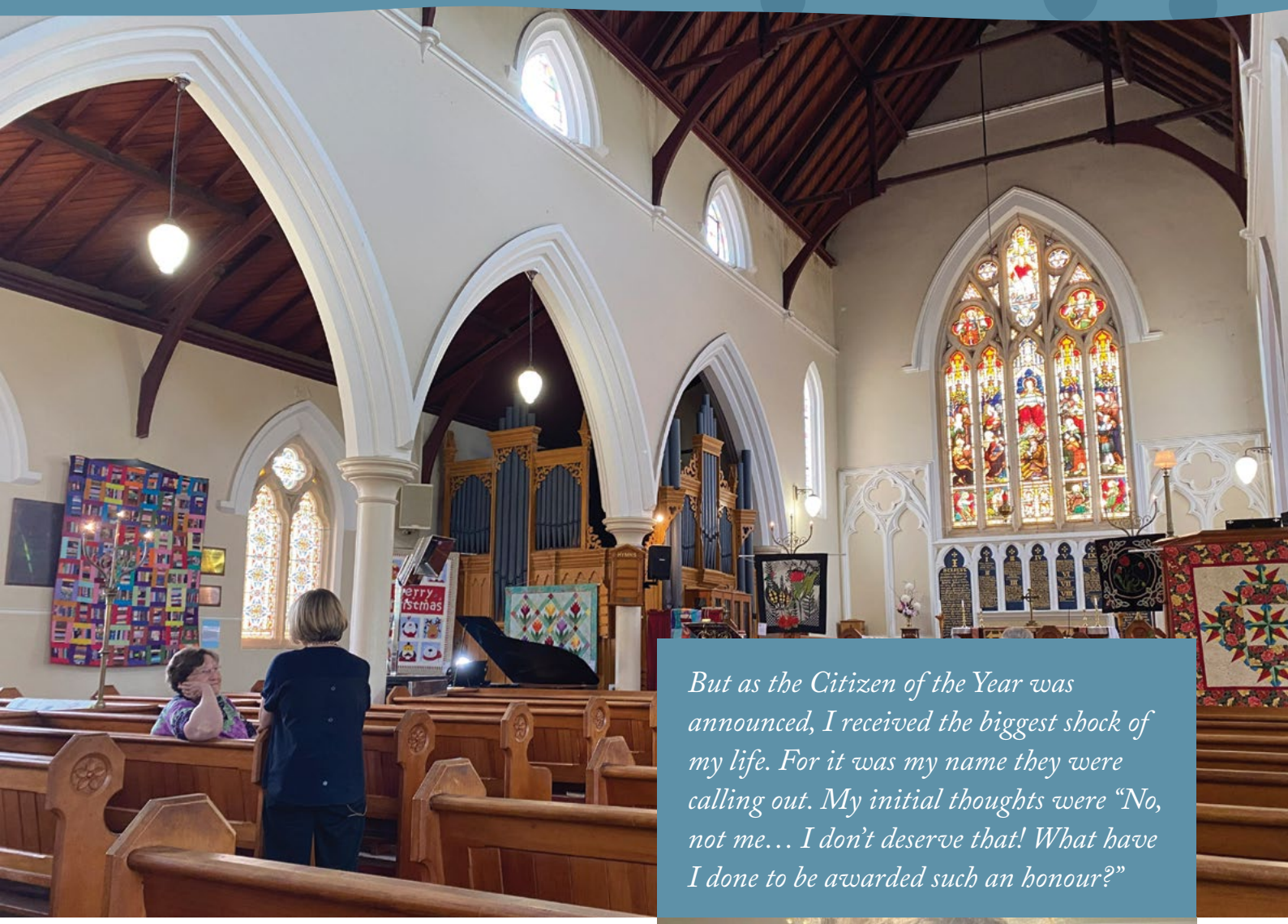
This year, however, I was told by one of my fellow committee members that we, the committee, had been asked to attend the Australia Day Awards ceremony organised by our local council. She said no more than that, but as there is usually an award for Event of the Year, I immediately assumed that maybe the Book Fair had been nominated and maybe we might even be the winner! After all, the book fair has been happening for many years, and has developed into one of the most popular book fairs of the area and quite a draw-card to the town. I even thought of a little acceptance speech, just in case.

My pride however, was in for a fall. The award for Event of the Year was not given to the Book Fair. As I applauded the winner, I tried to hide my disappointment and forgot about the little acceptance speech I had prepared.

But as the Citizen of the Year was announced, I received the biggest shock of my life. For it was my name they were calling out. My initial thoughts were "No, not me... I don't deserve that! What have I done to be awarded such an honour?"

I was deeply honoured and humbled to receive this award, but I also realised how fortunate I was to be surrounded by such a supportive and dedicated community. This accolade was as much a reflection of their support as it was of my efforts.

High Fidelity playing at St Stephen's Anglican Church, Majors Creek, photo by Liz Jakimow



St Andrew's Anglican Church Braidwood during the Airing of the Quilts, photo by Liz Jakimow

But as the Citizen of the Year was announced, I received the biggest shock of my life. For it was my name they were calling out. My initial thoughts were "No, not me… I don't deserve that! What have I done to be awarded such an honour?"

It was also a reflection of my Christian faith, which encouraged values such as love, service and compassion, and profoundly influenced how I interacted with those around me and contributed to the communities to which life has led me.

Prior to retirement, my husband and I had a very demanding life - establishing, nurturing and managing our own veterinary practice and hospital in Canberra. After we retired, we moved to Majors Creek, 16 kilometres out from Braidwood. Pride of place in the village is a lovely little stone church, St Stephen's Anglican Church where we toddled along to our first service. God works in mysterious ways as I am now warden for that church and we are both active members of the Braidwood Anglican Parish, of which St Stephen's is an outlying church.

I fully embraced life in a small supportive country town and found ways to contribute to the community using my God-given skills. I joined many community groups, encompassing different interests, different people and different situations. It seemed that my faith had been somewhat tucked away during those busy 24/7 working days. Upon retirement, God could bring it back to where it belongs – the focus of my life.

Recent years have seen a decline in church attendance, which has meant we need to find new ways of keeping the church going and reaching out to the community. Like many other churches, our Parish is unable to afford a full-time minister. As a result, we have been working towards becoming Lay Lead with the help of a part-time Priest. This has proven to be a long-involved process during which our Lord has helped us through many obstacles, proving to us that we were taking the right path. We now have three Lay Leaders, including myself, and are supported by a locum priest, Jane Foulcher, who is overseeing our much-needed training.

We have also been reaching out to the community in various ways, including publishing reflections in the local newspaper, advertising services and making use of social media to post Christian messages.

Our church buildings often host various events, such as regular top quality concerts in the Braidwood St Andrew's Church, where the acoustics receive as many accolades as the performers. We also participate in the annual Braidwood Quilt Event by displaying beautiful quilts in St Andrew's Church and providing a quiet, cool space away from the hubbub of the town. St Stephen's Church in Majors Creek is used as a venue for the Majors Creek Music Festival each year, with a service of thanksgiving, filled with music and with song. Last festival, when High Fidelity, a Christian bluegrass band, provided the music for the service, the Church was packed to the rafters. Did people come to hear the music or the message? We left that in God's hands.

One of the main, sustaining outreach activities of the Parish has been the Book Fair. Thirty years ago, it started as a small box of books offered for sale after Sunday worship, as a means of fundraising to support the parish. This has now expanded to hundreds of boxes containing thousands of books and amazing book fairs which are held twice each year and draw many donations and visitors. The small band of parishioners who originally organised the event has now expanded to over 40 volunteers, mostly from local community groups, with the proceeds going to help the community.

Reflecting on the miracles and blessings that have unfolded in my life, I am filled with gratitude for the Lord's unwavering presence and guidance. Through Him, I achieved what once seemed impossible, and my faith was strengthened in ways I could never have imagined. Yes, there have been times when I have pushed Him aside as my life activities became more important to me. Yet new seasons have provided new opportunities to serve Him in different ways. His voice continues to be my source of inspiration and strength, and I remain committed to following His lead, knowing that with Him, all things are possible.

Marjorie Lemin was awarded Citizen of the Year for Braidwood for her impressive service to her community, especially her leadership of the Braidwood Book Fair. The event runs twice a year and has steadily grown over the last 30 years to become a major fundraising event in Braidwood. The success of the event is largely thanks to the selflessness, diligence and hard work of Marjorie. Marjorie is also an active and respected member of the Anglican Parish and other community groups.

(From the Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council website – **www.qprc.nsw.gov.au**)

Recent years have seen a decline in church attendance, which has meant we need to find new ways of keeping the church going and reaching out to the community.

Love in action

Pastor Julie Connah

St Margaret's Uniting Church, Hackett

It is early on a Saturday morning, any one of 50 Saturdays in the year, and people are beginning to gather at the Holy Cross Anglican/St Margaret's Uniting Church site in Hackett.

First of all, are the volunteers who arrive to sort and organise donated bread, fruit and vegetables, under the church entry at Holy Cross.

Also with an early start are the team that are setting up for the White Elephant stall. Racks of clothes, household goods and small items of furniture, toys, books, DVDs, sporting equipment and more, and a trailer filled with cuttings and pots of plants are for sale. One Saturday a month the White Elephant is a larger event, but every week it provides much for those who come looking, at a very low cost.

At about 11am the Tuckerbox sign-in list is available, and names are quickly added to the sheet; people who need the help and support of a subsidised supermarket at a time when it is hard to make household ends meet. Over the last 15 years, Tuckerbox has had hundreds of registered households and regularly helps between 80 and 150 each Saturday. Some people come every week, others come now and then, depending on the need. Some are young and struggling, while others are retired and living on limited income. Some bring their children or their elderly parents. Some come on the local bus, others walk or drive. The Tuckerbox community is very diverse.

Whilst waiting for Tuckerbox to begin, many people sit around in the garden or buildings (the Tuckerbox begins serving at 1pm). To help fill this gap, folks from St Margaret's Uniting run Maggie's café from 11:30am to 3:00pm for the Tuckerbox people and for anyone else who wants to come by. Serving tea, coffee, cold drinks and a wide array of delicious home-baked cakes, slices and sandwiches, Maggie's is very popular. Whilst no one is charged, most customers and friends like to make a small donation to help cover the cost of ingredients. Over a cup of coffee and a cake, many conversations take place, creating a tangible sense of community and support.

Once Tuckerbox opens at 1pm, names are called for their turn to select and buy from a wide range of supermarket items and necessities. Then, after they have made their purchases, customers are given a token to go to the bread and fruit and vegetable tables for free perishable items.

Some also make the most of the arrival of the Orange Sky van, to have clothes and household washing done and dried.

Running on Saturday afternoons on the site, is Meg's Toybox, a toy library that allows families to borrow toys for a small fee, and then return them in exchange for other toys. The sound of children playing in the playground fills the air.

Saturdays at Holy Cross/St Margaret's have become the centre of the community, demonstrating love in action. All are welcome – people of all faiths and none.

Our valuable volunteers come from the two churches and from the local community: retirees, students, workers, unemployed or between jobs. All come with a desire to help and make a difference in our local community. And more volunteers are always needed. If you are interested in volunteering with Tuckerbox, please contact Kirsty Baker (kirsty@holycrosshackett.org.au).

Whilst Sunday worship services are an important part of the week, Saturdays have become the heart of what we do and how we live our lives as followers of the God who loves everyone and has compassion for all.

Saturdays at Holy Cross/St Margaret's have become the centre of the community, demonstrating love in action. All are welcome – people of all faiths and none.

Photo supplied by the author

A creative workshop: bringing Christian faith and creation care together

Dr Sally Shaw

Director, A Rocha Australia and Adjunct Lecturer, Adelaide College of Leadership and Theology

The Christian Scriptures, even though they were not written to address contemporary environmental issues, are the primary source for the development of a theology of creation care (ecotheology) that is integral to Christian mission. Central to this mission is the command to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31) but this can only happen when we take action to ensure there is a healthy and flourishing environment for our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs. Yet some groups within the Protestant Church, including those who identify as evangelical Christians, remain tied to beliefs that elevate the spiritual over the physical and therefore see "saving souls" as the priority of mission. (Bookless, 2008). This has resulted in some Christians having ambivalent or antagonistic attitudes towards care for creation (Bouma-Prediger, 2021). However, Tearfund's 2022 Climate Report shows that Generation Z are feeling overwhelmed by the pessimistic narrative about the future of this planet and are not encouraged to attend a church that is not addressing their concerns.

In light of these ambivalent attitudes, as part of my Doctor of Ministry studies, I designed and trialled a workshop using an Education Design Research (EDR) methodology with a research question asking: *What features of an arts-based experiential workshop are most likely to lead to a transformative wholistic awareness of creation care for Christians to more fully integrate their faith with creation care?*

I trialled the one-day workshop protype with two different cohorts. The participants were Christians aged between 24-60, 20% male and 80% female, with the majority from local evangelical churches. The design of the workshop and pedagogy was based on extensive literature review and my personal real-world experience. I invited the participants to actively explore environmental issues along with the biblical reasons for creation care through the following workshop features: the arts (paintings, drawing, poetry and film), Indigenous connection to country, climate change and practical action, organic food, a comparison between a shopping mall and a natural setting, theological content, discussion and reflection. The learning was collaborative, with the capacity to encourage their faith and creation care to be integrated.

To assess the knowledge and practice of the participants, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The quantitative method asked them to complete a pre and post workshop questionnaire with questions on the biblical reasons for creation care, awareness of environmental issues and their eco-friendly practices. The qualitative method asked the participants to illustrate, through drawing a "rich picture," what features in the workshop they had found most helpful. These pictures were later used during a semi-structured interview with each participant. This method allowed the participants to enjoy the experience and provide honest answers and rich descriptive data.

What features of an arts-based experiential workshop are most likely to lead to a transformative wholistic awareness of creation care for Christians to more fully integrate their faith with creation care?

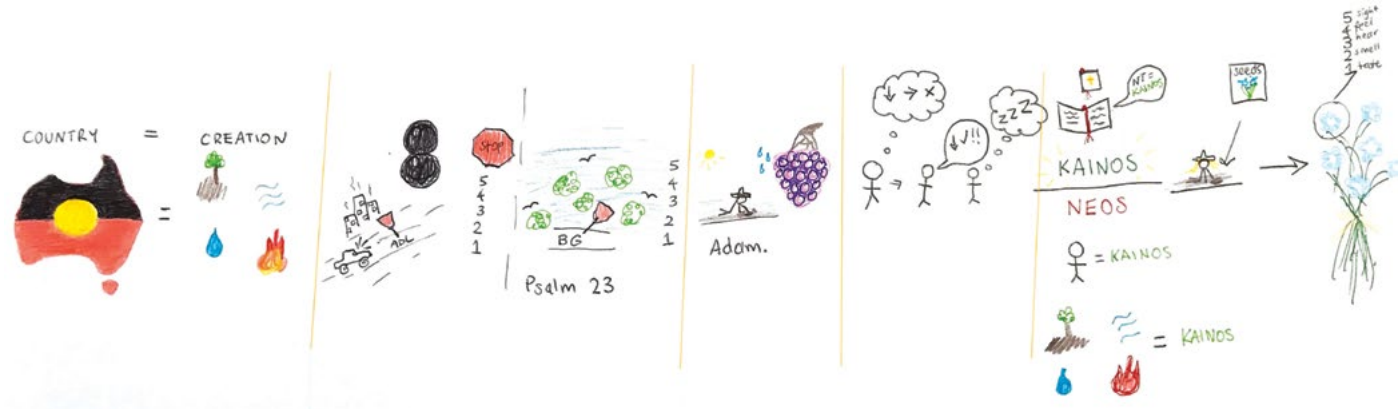


Figure 3, rich picture, image supplied by author

Participants from one workshop drawing their rich picture, photo supplied by author

All participants drew inspiring pictures with a number illustrating all the features of the workshop. For example, one participant included Indigenous connection to land, climate change, environmental crisis, biblical reasons to care for creation, and practical activities (Figure 3). Another included the causes of climate change, the Indigenous talk, biblical reasons to care for creation, the new heaven and earth, and practical activities.

The research captured key statements from the participants. Three examples demonstrate the feelings of the participants.

- "Many of the workshop features had helped me understand the importance of creation care but I feel sad that neither my church nor Christian friends are interested in this topic."
- "I didn't realise just how much climate change affects the poor; it makes the gap between the rich and poor even greater."
- "I have never heard a church minister talk about the biblical reasons for creation care, or even environmental issues such as climate change."

The research outcomes also included a 6-month post-workshop assessment. These results and the assessments provided strong evidence that the research question had been answered, and that the workshop features had resulted in varying degrees of change with a desire to more fully integrate their faith with creation care and seek new ways to take action.

These results along with an evaluation of the workshop content and design by an external educator led to a workshop template being created that would be suitable for churches and para-church groups.

Following the completion of my Doctor of Ministry research the workshop template, using the key workshop features, has been trialled with different groups of Christians, one parachurch group and a theological college. They learnt about the workshop through their friends and via media channels. Each workshop was similar but with varying lengths. Feedback from the participants, and my own evaluation, concluded that the 10am-3pm timing, on a Saturday, worked best as it enabled all features to be included and time for good discussions.

The feedback from the two research workshops, and the subsequent ones have demonstrated that the majority of the participants were keen to integrate their faith more with creation care and take practical action. Four past participants are now keen to assist me and/or become facilitators of the course. I therefore plan to produce a workshop training manual, that would be used in a short training of trainer's workshop Further recommendations to extend the reach of this workshop continue to be considered.

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What are we throwing away?

Lisa Wriley

Co-Leader Wellspring Community

I am a sixth generation settler – coloniser Australian. My Dad loved bushwalking and my Kiwi mum still loves gardening. I have spent the last 30 years trying to make a difference to how we treat this sacred earth – through how I live, through campaigning for better policies and practices, volunteering at community gardens and in the church and through education for sustainability.

What does sustainability mean for me? It means enough for everyone everywhere forever. It means caring about our fellow creatures and the web of life – from microbes to whales. It means not wasting materials that we extract from the earth but keeping them in circulation – re-using, repairing, refilling and re-thinking more than recycling.

I love the concept of regenerative agriculture, regenerating soil, giving back and keeping things in balance. Humans have done so much damage to the earth in my lifetime (and before that).

I was born on Gadigal land in 1971. Our family was given a board game called CONSERVATION (or "Be a Tidy Kiwi" game) by friends in New Zealand.

In this 1976 game you collect points for composting, saving energy, picking up litter, recycling glass and paper and spending time in nature. Players use "I Care" cards to help them get points. There are penalties for wasting energy or littering.

We have known about the problems and the changes needed for a long time. Sometimes I do despair. Why is change so slow? Why are we still so wasteful? Why are we still hooked on fossil fuels? Why are we still destroying habitat?

My approach is to channel my despair into action and to not give up my hope that we can live better and fairer lives. I try to learn about the systemic problems and lobby for changes. I believe that if more people understand the problems and the impact of our decisions, they will also demand changes and can make better choices.

In my Quaker faith it is an important testimony to earthcare or stewardship of this sacred earth. I am inspired by fellow people of faith and their actions, including the Faith Ecology Network, Australian Religious Response to Climate Change and Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. I have yet to read the "sequel," *Laudate Deum*: Apostolic Exhortation to all people of goodwill on the climate crisis.

We can all do things every day for God's earth:

- Use less plastic eg sit in the coffee shop for your coffee in a cup or BYO cup
- Choose to reuse eg food & drink containers, bags, plates, cups & cutlery
- Buy recycled (plastic, glass, paper and metal products – support a circular economy)
- Pick up litter and clean a waterway (every day is Clean Up Australia day)
- Choose green energy and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions
- Be more energy efficient eg have shorter showers and turn off appliances
- Walk, ride or use public transport whenever possible
- Compost our food waste at home, at a community garden (or by finding a local composter using the new PEELs app) or through a Council Food Organics collection.
- Conserve water and honour it as the source of all life
- Love and protect nature where we live – support or join conservation groups

One way we can teach a new generation of children the importance of these basic aspects of living gently on the earth is by playing the EARTHCARE game with them**. Our children need to know where their water, energy and materials come from so they can make wise choices. The online world has limited connections to real daily decisions. Now more than ever we need to connect to nature, to Country.

We can also actively lobby all levels of government to protect and regenerate nature, subsidise renewable energy and install solar and community batteries in social housing estates and other neighbourhoods. Governments can bring in policies that require all new products to contain at least 50% recycled content. There is a great global report – Zero Waste to Zero Emissions. A Google search will find it.

As a Quaker how do I "Let my life Speak"?

I minimise waste to landfill, compost and worm farm and use washable pads. We have solar hot water, water tanks for our washing machine and flushing toilets, and a composting toilet in our old weatherboard house. I shop at Op Shops and ethically made clothing/underwear makers. I drive a 100% electric Nissan LEAF, bought from the Good Car Company with money I got from my share of Dad's superannuation when he died suddenly at 72 years young.

In 2003 I headed up the Uniting Church Earth Team for the National Christian Youth Convention ensuring that 2,000 young people experienced a truly waste-wise event. For 20 years I have volunteered at Kariong Eco Garden promoting sustainability. As Co-Leader and sustainability contact person for the Wellspring Community I have taken part in two years of the Peoples' Blockade of the Newcastle Coal Port dressed as a penguin holding a sign "Penguins for a Safe Climate and Green Jobs for Humans."

I am so grateful to have had work as a waste educator in Environmental Education Centres and as a campaigner for the Total Environment Centre and the Boomerang Alliance campaigning for refunds on bottles and cans and the phasing out of single-use plastics. To be able to live out my faith in my work is such a blessing. I am currently working on a project Solving Organic Waste with ten local schools. Please pray for this work and all those working for a safe climate.

Let's not waste this sacred earth. We are so blessed to be here.

I re-generated the NZ CONSERVATION game, with permission, and called it EARTHCARE. I spent a lot of time making sure every part of the games are ethically sourced.

Lisa Wriley as "Bev the Bottle" at Manly, photo supplied by author

Photo by Liz Jakimow

My Christocentric year

Michael Galovic

Artist and Iconographer

Last year, 2024 was fairly eventful for me. A number of months' work on icons of St George resulted in a show titled "St George vs Dragon" in a lovely stone All Saints Anglican church in Hunters Hill, Sydney. This period coincided with the efforts in finishing my latest publication *Sailing Back to Byzantium* and the book reached me in early July. The same church was the venue for the book launch on 28 July.

After some travelling time through Europe, I could fully resume my artistic activity in early December.

Prior to all this I came to an idea of focusing on my next five years' period. To that end I came up with a list of works I would like to create; some were traditional icons, the others contemporary religious art. High up on the list were two bodies of work on Christ. One was to be dedicated mostly to the traditional icons of His Face called Mandilion or The Holy Face made without Human Hands and the Pantocrator type of icons showing Christ half-figured with a book and the blessing hand.

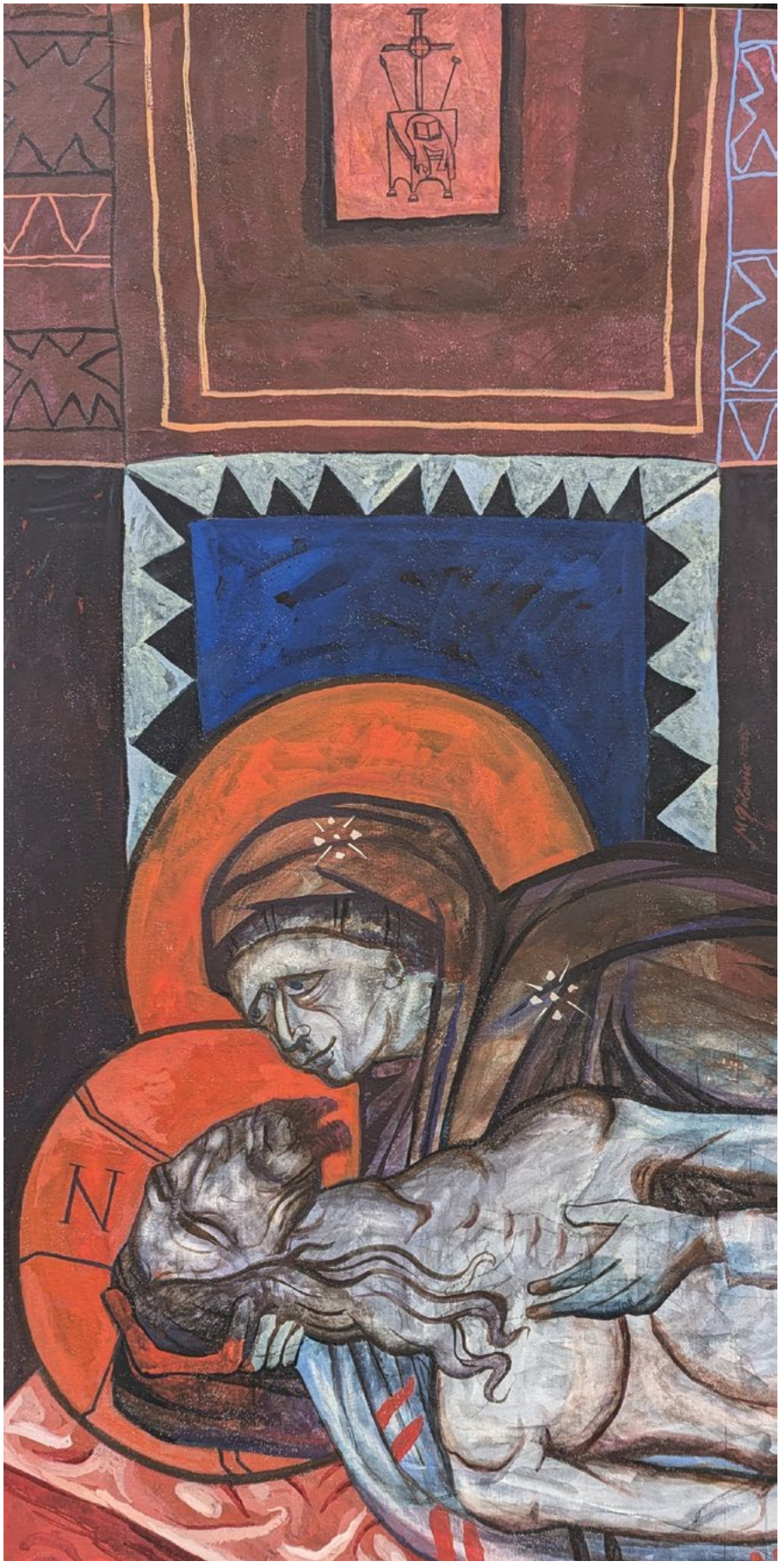
The other will be talked about at a later stage as the body of that work on a bigger scale is to be exhibited at the ACC&C in Canberra in March 2026. This project is already well underway and is unfolding as per my expectations.

As we know, the physical appearance of Jesus the Christ was not mentioned in the Scriptures and yet we have an overwhelming number of depictions of Him since early Christianity and counting. But how do we as artists decide to depict Christ and why are all those creations often wildly different and even astounding in their diversity?

For years I have been making my personal archive of these depictions mainly in the traditional icons and intend to address the subject matter with a more in-depth essay. I have made numerous icons of Christ throughout my 50-odd years of iconographic activity but now it was time to revisit my own accumulated experience, reflections on the matter and make new pieces.

It started with a focus on Christ's head or face, the Mandilion type of icon as mentioned above, The Holy Face made without Human Hands, *Acheiropoietos* (Greek) or *Obraz Nerukotvoreni* (Slavonic). The icon type originates from King Abgar legend or belief from the time before Christ's Passion and Resurrection which will be recounted in detail when the essay or article is completed.

Dodekaorton, artwork by Michael Galovic



The Great Lament, artwork by Michael Galovic

As we know, the physical appearance of Jesus the Christ was not mentioned in the Scriptures and yet we have an overwhelming number of depictions of Him since early Christianity and counting. But how do we as artists decide to depict Christ and why are all those creations often wildly different and even astounding in their diversity?

Through many years of studying icons and making them, I believed I understood their essence at least in the Byzantine period. Icons seek to stylise all elements of their narrative as to distort this earthly reality and bring us closer to the higher realm, the heavenly one. They are basically with one foot in this reality and with the other in the one Christians aspire to, as we can recognise their depictions and yet are mystified by the oddity and otherworldly way they are presented.

Asymmetry. Imperfection. In the Byzantine iconography, icons and frescoes, both are intentional, well-thought and balanced out, the latter often enough a sketchy yet clever way to disguise the utter mastery.

As far as faces are concerned, the asymmetry is best shown in the eyes of a saint, Theotokos or Christ himself. We have the most striking examples from Fayum portraits, Hagia Sofia, Ravena, and in a number of early Christian icons, frescoes and mosaics. Most people are familiar with Christ Pantocrator from St Catherine Monastery on Mount Sinai (6th century).

My own iconic depiction was conceived and thought through along those guidelines. It also means that all subsequent depictions will follow the same internalised knowledge but with the outcome much different in its outer form.

Mandilion, artwork by Michael Galovic

For many years my strong focus was the Crucifixion as the ultimate "drama of mankind." Although I am revisiting this subject in my art all the time, my focus is also on the Lamentation and the Resurrection. Another Lamentation was on my to-do list and it will not be the last one.

Always emphasising the enormous grief of a mother holding her son after a terrible passion and death on the cross, I decided to have this depiction on a bigger scale and in a monochromatic way. The board is 150x80 cm and was gessoed over a linen in a traditional way with rabbit skin glue and whiting, endeavouring to get the texture of the church wall so it can be evocative of medieval fresco.

Using my tempera technique I painted the background with elements of decorative bands featuring on medieval frescoes, from Serbia to Cappadocia. This juxtaposition of geometrical and graphic elements with the iconographic rendition introduces the sense of ambiguity as well, being something used in art, especially modern art.

The lower register tells us of this immense sorrow and grief on a human level. In the upper register I included the scene from Hetimasia or the (already) prepared throne for Christ's Second Coming. Hetimasia can be depicted in many (infinite) ways but I chose the simplest possible, a linear one as to avoid distraction from the main image and focus.

At times, there is a blur between a traditional icon and a contemporary rendition. I would call this a contemporary religious artwork based on and inspired by traditional icons.

My Christocentric period of an anticipated year or so continues with a number of Mandilion and Pantocrator type icons, with the emphasis on bigger size works of destructions and calamities of modern times interspersed and interwoven with the solemn beauty of precious medieval art of icons and frescos. The latter body of work should feature in March of 2026 at ACC&C, Canberra.

The *Sailing Back to Byzantium* publication keeps being much talked about and sought, both in Australia and overseas. Its 260 pages, filled with images of my traditional icons and contemporary religious art, as well as many relevant and illuminating texts by various authors, can be purchased through my new website: www.michaelgalovic.com containing reviews and other visual material.

A general consensus is that this is not only a book on religious art, but a piece of art in itself becoming very popular for gifts to the art lovers and art practitioners alike.

Michael Galovic in his studio

Christianity and Australian history

Professor Wayne Hudson

Emeritus Professor, ACC&C and Professor of Australian Studies at Foreign Studies University Beijing

It is impossible to discuss the role of Christianity in Australian history in a few words. Readers of *Engage* might be interested to know, however, why this is the case.

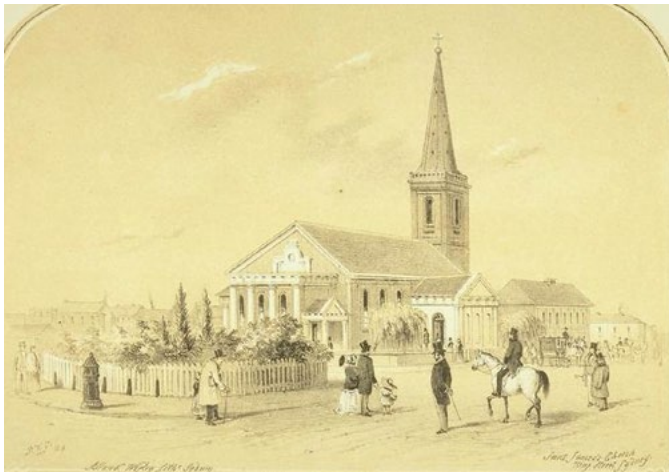
The term 'Australia' needs to be deployed with some precision. There was no legal Australia in the nineteenth century. There were only individual colonies with their own armies, taxes, coinage and citizenships. Federation did not establish an Australian nation state: it achieved a federation of colonies within the British Empire. It could also be misleading to suggest that peoples living on a large land mass in the Pacific were "Australians." No one became an Australian by getting off a boat and no one ceased to be Australian when they caught an aeroplane. Indigenous peoples and white colonial settlers were not always seen as "Australian" in the same sense, and when white Anzacs referred to "home" in their letters, as many of them did, they largely meant Britain. Nor is it the case that all "the real Australians" lived on the same land mass. Significant numbers of Australian creatives, especially artists and writers, lived overseas, especially in Britain and the United States, but also in Europe and Asia. And until at least 1960 many Australians regarded themselves as *Australians and British*. When I went as a boy to Tasmania to stay with my relatives, my aunt spoke House of Lords English and the village I stayed in, Campbell Town, had a Highland games at which the men wore tartans. The term "Australia" is now contested and the Imperialist accounts of our history which I learnt at school have also been subjected to justified criticism.

The case of "Christianity" is no easier. The older literature suggested that Australia was largely secular and even perhaps the most secular country on earth. This is not accurate. Christianity came to Australia in various and different forms. The most important perhaps was civic Christianity, a form of statecraft imposed by British law and we need to remember that Christianity was part of the common law until well into the nineteenth century. Another form of Christianity was heavily ethnocentric. Christianity of this sort came to Australia in mainly Anglican, Protestant and Roman Catholic forms. Some of it was characterised by sectarianism and even hatred. Even in the 1950s the terms "Protestant" and "Catholic" were taken to refer to two different religions, country towns often had Protestant and Catholic butchers and chemists, law firms were often reluctant to hire staff "of a different religion" and the public service was dominated by Free Mason and Catholic cabals who sought to secure appointments for their members. Catholics were not allowed to attend Protestant church services including funerals and weddings, although they sometimes did so, and were strictly forbidden to attend state schools. There were, to be fair, many Christians who were less constrained—Anglo-Catholic Anglicans, Presbyterians with solid Hebrew and Greek, some Orthodox and remarkable progressive Methodists, Congregationalists and at times Baptists. It is also true that there were serious theological institutions in Australia, although theological learning was denominational and rarely exchanged. In my Sydney childhood, Christian clergy willing to discuss the theological writings of Fichte and Hegel were hard to find. The Orthodox and the Lutherans were in a different category and Luther Seminary in Adelaide had amazing holdings. These traditions, however, had only a limited influence on Australian institutions.

A case could be made that the Christianity that most obviously shaped Australia was neither dogmatic nor perhaps even doctrinal. Australia was decisively shaped, by Christian sentiments, above all, fairness and kindness. This kindness, however, did not extend to all and was dramatically lacking at times where the Indigenous and the Chinese were concerned.

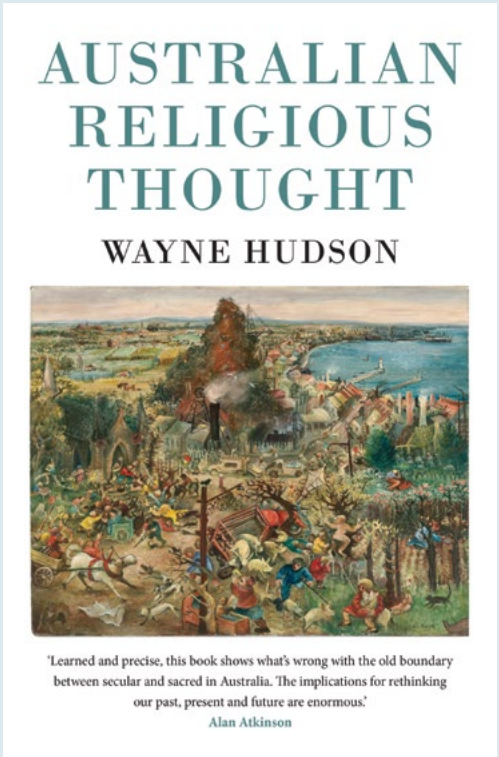
A case could be made that the Christianity that most obviously shaped Australia was not dogmatic or even perhaps doctrinal. Australia was decisively shaped by Christian virtues and sentiments, above all, consideration, fairness and kindness expressed in organisational and institutional forms. These virtues, however, were not exercised equally in regard to all and were dramatically lacking at times where the Indigenous and the Chinese were concerned. White settler Christians might have been concerned to convert non-Christians, but their understanding of other spiritual traditions was limited.

The influence of Christian sentiments on Australian organisational and institutional forms, however, was substantial. As is well known, the decision in the famous Harvester case on the "fair and reasonable living wage" for unskilled labourers was influenced by the 1891 papal encyclical, *Rerum Novarum,* and Australian approaches to work and welfare were significantly shaped not only by Catholic and Evangelical social activism, but by Charles Strong and his Australian Church in Melbourne, as Marion Maddox's collection *Charles Strong's Australian Church Christian Social Activism, 1885-1917* (2021) establishes.



In the outcome, many Australian institutions were characterised not by secularism but by what I called in my *Australian Religious Thought* (2016) sacral secularity or the tendency to associate the secular with sacral characteristics. Consistent with this, as John Gascoigne, Stephen Chavura and Stuart Piggin among others have shown, "secular" in the nineteenth century meant "common Christian." A related case can be made for the influeunce of Christianity on Australian law, as I argued in *Australian Jurists and Christianity* (2021). Even now Australia is exceptional in its extensive reliance on state funded Christian schools and its reliance on churches to deliver welfare. It is fair to comment that Christian influence had its downside and perhaps made it difficult for Australians to understand Muslims and the contemporary Middle East. On the other hand, Christianity offers Australia a range of outstanding resources which could be useful in furthering its integration into Asia and the world more generally.

As my remarks suggest, more research is needed into both Australian history and the influence of Christianity upon it. Young Australians tend to know little about either, and this is dangerous, both internally and in the context of the Asia Pacific.



***Australian Religious Thought* by Wayne Hudson is available from Monash University Publishing publishing.monash.edu**

HG Brennan Lecture and Workshop in Economics and Theology

Dr Jonathan Cole

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

On 6 February, Dr Catherine de Fontenay, a Commissioner at the Productivity Commission, gave the annual HG Brennan lecture in Economics and Theology to a packed Chambers Pavilion at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, on the topic of economics and selfishness. The lecture forms part of a program that includes an annual two-day workshop on economics and theology that is also named in honour of the late HG Brennan, a highly regarded Australian political philosopher and political economist, who played a key role in fostering dialogue between Christian economists and theologians in Australia and is noted for his work with economics Nobel Prize winner James M Buchanan.

Dr de Fontenay explored the way in which the typical view of the human being adopted by economists, namely that humans are self-interested actors responsive to incentives, shapes and distorts their worldview. Noting that efforts have been made to broaden this rather thin anthropology to take account of things like altruism, Dr de Fontenay nevertheless suggested that the cardinal sin of the economist was arrogance. The economist all too often envisages themselves as masterful social planner, able to pull and tweak the levers of various incentives to produce outcomes *they* deem just and beneficial. Dr de Fontenay advocated a more humble and collaborative method in which economists respect and respond to the democratic process whereby citizens express their values and voice their preferences. She argued that economists were not well-placed to unilaterally determine questions of value, social justice and social costs on behalf of the citizen body, and must work with and within the democratic institutional framework to help society attain the ends it wants. The role of the economist, she maintained, was to advise citizens and the institutions through which their will is given expression on the means, costs and benefits of various policy choices.

The workshop, attended by Dr de Fontenay and a group of 20 economists and theologians from Australia and New Zealand, discussed three commissioned papers on the topic of

usuary and financial regulation. The objective of the workshop, which explores a new theme each year, was to investigate the potential wisdom found in the Christian Scriptures and theological tradition on the topic of just lending, and in our contemporary context, the efficacy of financial markets and regulatory regimes. Prof Mark Brett, one of Australia's leading biblical scholars, from the University of Divinity, authored the first paper that offered a careful and nuanced analysis of all major biblical passages dealing with the issue of usuary, concluding that the concern that animated the biblical authors was exploitative lending practices that prayed on the poor in an agrarian economy in which disasters, such as weather events and family death, placed families in extreme economic hardship. Reserve Bank board member and former dean of the Melbourne Business School, Melbourne University, Prof Ian Harper, and Mr Peter Kurti of the Centre for Independent Studies authored the second paper called "Interest, Usuary and the Common Good," which explored the vital function of interest loans in contemporary financial markets, in conjunction with the need to cater to people who lack either the means to get approved for loans or repay them once approved, as well as the challenge of unregulated loan-shark markets. The final paper was authored by Prof Paul Oslington, an Adjunct Research Professor at the Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society, Charles Sturt University, who asked whether certain institutional practices, such as debauching currencies, could be considered modern forms of usuary. These articles will be included in a special issue of *Studies in Christian Ethics* edited by Paul Oslington and Jonathan Cole.

The lecture and two-day workshop offered three days of serious dialogue and careful reflection on questions of economic justice and the relationship between the Biblical texts, theological doctrines, and ever evolving economic practices and circumstances.

Photos by Liz Jakimow

Theology Matters

Professor Peter Sherlock

Associate Director of the Yindyamarra Trust at Charles Sturt University

Does theology make any difference to Australian life? My colleague Daniel Nellor and I have spent the last three years wrestling with this question, Daniel bringing expertise as a philosopher and me as an historian and theologian. The results are now available in our newly published short book, *Theology Matters: How Thinking About God Shapes Australia* (Coventry Press, 2024).

There are many good studies of Australian theology, but mostly they examine how theology itself has developed in this land, or how it has affected the Christian churches. We sought instead to understand how theological study or theological engagement affects the lives of Australians beyond the churches. So we contacted a range of individual Australians who have a theology degree or who have engaged deeply with theological knowledge, and whose careers have been predominantly outside the Church, and invited them to participate in this project.

Our final participants came from a wide range of professional backgrounds – law, education, health, science, politics, art, journalism, Indigenous activism. We interviewed them about their faith, theological study, and careers, and asked about what they have learned about theology's value. The results are a series of short profiles of our eleven participants: Deborah Barker, Rufus Black, Frank Brennan, Libby Byrne, Julie Edwards, Dan Fleming, Stan Grant, Sean Lau, Anne Pattel-Gray, Tony Rinaudo and Kevin Rudd.

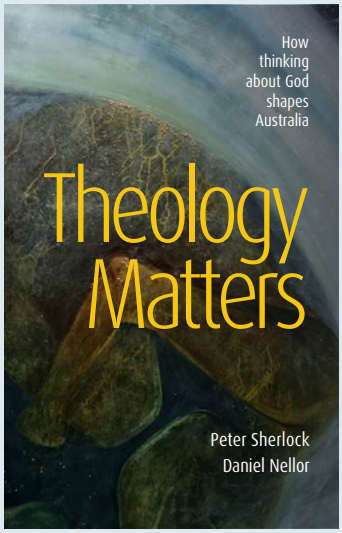
We are deeply grateful for their willingness to participate in this project. Three critical insights emerged from their stories.

First, each participant had a remarkable capacity to think outside the box, to bring fresh ideas and critical thinking to the "wicked problems" of twenty-first century life. Many commented on how theology equipped them to ask the biggest questions of all: Who is God? Why are we here? What is life for?

Second, theology engendered in each participant a deep compassion for other human beings and a profound commitment to seeking justice. This involved a willingness to be proven wrong, to stand against the crowd, to ask hard questions.

Third, and vitally important, participants were able to identify actions, often drawn from Christian history and spirituality, that offered effective solutions and built the solidarity or consensus needed to deliver them.

Now that the book is published, we've been delighted to see it read by individuals and study groups. In reflecting on the project, we can see several implications needing further research. How does Christian theological education need to change – or stay the same – if it is to continue to contribute to a robust and more just society in Australia? What might other stories tell us, especially the impact of theologians from faiths other than Christianity?



***Theology Matters* is now available for purchase for $24.95 online at coventrypress.com.au**

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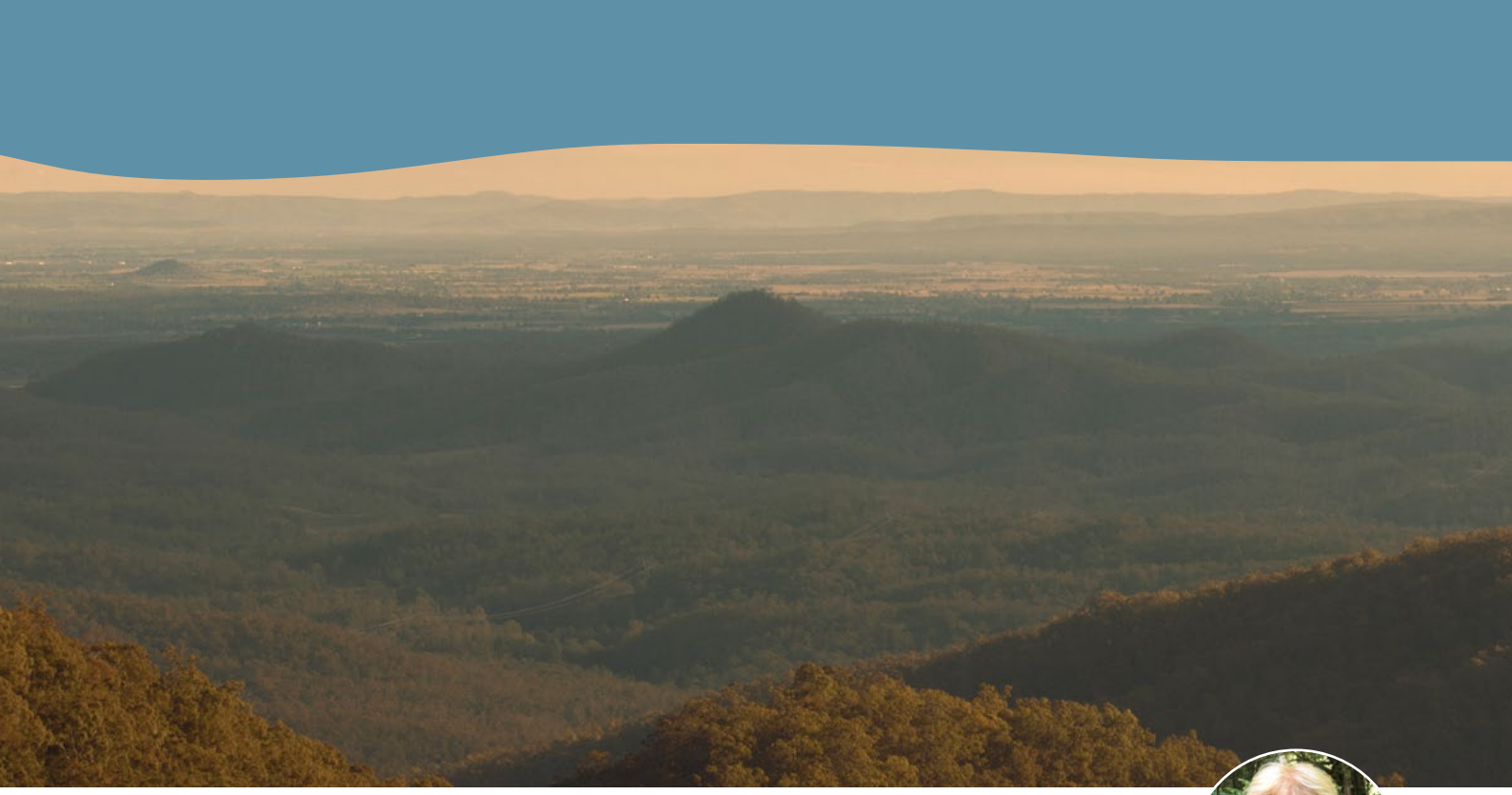


Sacred Geography: Place, Pilgrimage, Encounter

Carolyn Craig-Emilsen

Wellspring Upper Blue Mountains, Dharug and Gundungurra land

Sacred Geography: Place, Pilgrimage, Encounter, The Stockton Conversations, 27 October 2024, Sarah Bachelard (published by Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, 2024)

This review is amended from an article first published in "Pipeline".

Sarah Bachelard, philosophical theologian, leader of Benedictus Contemplative Church Canberra and a leader of the World Community for Christian Meditation was guest speaker at the first of The Stockton Conversations held on 27 October 2024 in Lawson in the Blue Mountains. The Stockton Conversations are named after Rev Dr Eugene Stockton, an ordained Catholic priest who has spent a lifetime listening to, learning from, and writing about the culture and spirituality of the First Nations People of the Blue Mountains.

The aim of the Stockton Conversations is "to stimulate thought and conversation on developing an Australian spirituality" which considers "the cultural and spiritual traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the place of Christianity in society, and Australia's multicultural identity."

From the outset Sarah captivated her audience of about 100 people with her talk "Sacred Geography: Place, Pilgrimage and Encounter." She began by quoting from David Whyte's poem *Start Close In*: "Start with/ the ground you know,/ the pale ground beneath your feet,/ your own way of starting the conversation." Sarah confessed her "themes of pilgrimage and belonging, place and displacement, and what it means to inhabit the earth aright – are dauntingly large." We were invited to accompany her as she shared why she is drawn to these and "something of 'the pale ground' beneath my feet."

She spoke of a pilgrim as broadly "defined as a foreigner, an exile, a wayfarer, someone not at home where they are walking." She shared something of her story of how she and her partner Neil embarked on the *Camino Francés* after an experience involving "the unexpected and shattering loss of identity and secure belonging" and "of seeking a way where there seemed no way." Sarah observed "among our fellow pilgrims this turned out to be a common story" and "the sense of there being a necessary journey without and within has come to inform much of our lives, including walks we lead as pilgrimage in the Tasmanian wilderness."

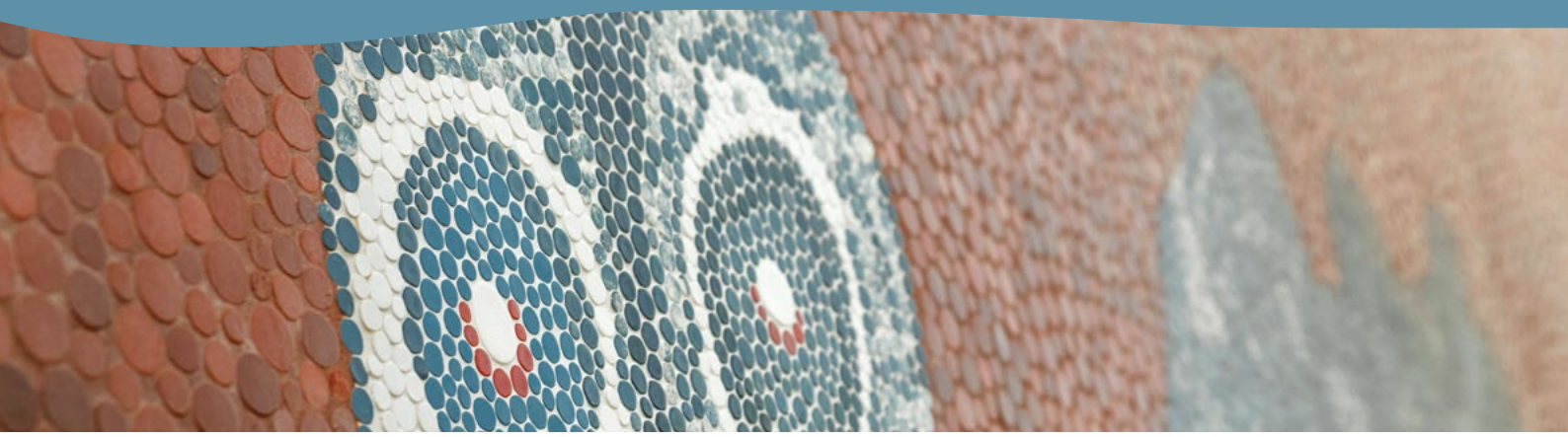
The next stage in awakening was to "the depth dimension of place in our own land." She spoke of the impact of the words of the elder and writer Margaret Kemarre 'MK' Turner: "The only way we can translate how we see relationship with the Land is with the words 'hold' and 'connect'. The roots of the country and its people are twined together. We are part of the Land. The Land is us, and we are the Land." Her second revelation was in central Australia, sleeping in a swag, waking to the night sky and experiencing "a strange and unexpected sense of belonging". This knowledge was "not conceptual but embodied". Sarah spoke of her yearning for a "way of relating to the earth, as a felt experience of kinship"

Sarah asks "what does it mean to claim the earth as holy ground, or to speak of a sacred geography?"

and the realisation that "the practice of living indoors, under a roof, cut off from the insistent presence of the whole" separated her from this awareness.

Sarah asks "what does it mean to claim the earth as holy ground, or to speak of a sacred geography?" She reminds us in Exodus God calls Moses from the burning bush "to come no closer for you are standing on holy ground." For her "it seems as though God is one thing and the earth is something else." She quotes Eugene Stockton from *The Aboriginal Gift*, that for Aboriginal people "the land is not just a surface over which one hunts, walks and lives" but, rather "the land together with its people, flora and fauna and everything else it contains, is a corporate, organic whole, at least as animate, sentient, intelligent and self-conscious as any of its organic parts," that the land "is a sacred place, the locus of creative acts of the Dreaming, which persists to the present."

"Many of us are yearning to reconnect" Sarah quotes the writer David Tacey that to experience a different way of beholding and belonging, "a journey is needed." But she observes, "the pilgrim walks *away* from home", whereas "an Indigenous Australian walking on country is wholly *at home*." She continues: "It makes me wonder if the contemporary impulse to pilgrimage in western culture could be conceived as a necessary precursor to rendering us capable of something like 'walking on country', in the sense of rediscovering our belonging to earth and the custodial responsibilities that accompany such belonging?" Sarah offers this suggestion: "In the end, we can only start where we are. What matters is our willingness to acknowledge where we are, to learn from the wisdom of many traditions and teachers, and then to be simply committed to take the next step and the next, so that more and more we come to know, body, mind and spirit, that we stand on holy ground."



Cries from the Anthropocene

10am – 3pm, 2-24 April
The Chapel

Ecumenical Way of the Cross

11am, Friday, 18 April
The Chapel and ACC&C grounds

Anzac Eve Peace Vigil

5.30 – 7.15pm. Thursday, 24 April
ACC&C grounds

CIMF Welcome to Country

Welcome to Country
4.30pm. Wednesday, 30 April
The Meeting Place, ACC&C

CANBERRA INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

CIMF Cycles and Variations

Cycles and Variations
11am. Sunday, 4 May
The Chapel

The Centre is unique in Australia. It began in 1998 as an ecumenical venture for engagement with Australian culture and the issues of the day. It was established through a partnership between Charles Sturt University and the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. It is situated at the eastern edge of the Parliamentary Triangle in Canberra on a 99-year lease to the University which currently provides the major source of its funding.

Charles Sturt University

www.acc-c.org.au

https://www.facebook.com/acccfourpillars/

Know anyone interested in film-making?

Why not tell them about the *Spiritus* Short Film Prize?

The *Spiritus* Short Film Prize is sponsored by the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture and is part of the Canberra Short Film Festival.

To be eligible to enter, a film must have been produced from January 2024 and be no longer than 12 minutes. Films will be judged on high artistic quality, wisdom for the common good, human and planetary flourishing, universal impact and inventive expression.

For more information about the *Spiritus* Short Film Prize, please go to: https://about.csu.edu.au/community/accc/spiritus/home

To enter a film by 31 August 2025, please go to the Canberra Short Film Festival website at https://filmfreeway.com/CanbShrtFilmFest and look under categories and fees for *Spiritus*.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

CANB SHRT FILM FEST

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WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD