

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

ENGAGE

December 2023 Issue 14

Reflection of 25 years
of the Australian
Centre for Christianity
and Culture

Bishop George Browning





Contents



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Acting Editor: Dr Jonathan Cole

Associate Editor: Liz Jakimow

Assistant Editor: Sarah Stitt

Address: 15 Blackall Street, BARTON ACT 2600

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For enquiries contact acc-c@csu.edu.au

Editorial



On 19 November, I had the privilege of speaking about the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture at a Choral Matins service at the historic St John's—an Anglican Church in Canberra dating back to the 1840s (predating the establishment of the national capital by about 70 years).

This talk came just three days after the Centre formally celebrated its 25th anniversary at Government House at an event hosted by Their Excellencies the Governor-General David Hurley and Mrs Linda Hurley, along with 50 guests, including current and former executive directors, board members, staff and adjuncts. So, it has been a season of reflection for me, as it has for many associated with the Centre, on where we have come from, where we are today, and where we intend to go from here.

At both events, I was struck by the continuity of purpose, spirit and vision that has faithfully been executed and supported by successive executive directors, board chairs, board members, staff, adjuncts, diocesan bishops, leaders from Charles Sturt University, interfaith partners and varied supporters over the last 25 years.

The identity, ethos and purpose inspired by Bishop George Browning and the supporters he gathered around the project of the Centre remain alive and well today. The Governor-General,

in his address at our celebration at Government House, stressed the valuable contribution the Centre has made to the life of our country over a quarter-century and the pressing need to continue the vision and example of Christian hospitality embodied by the Centre today. All those who have contributed to the success of the Centre, in large and small ways over the years, can take pride in our collective accomplishments. This year, although not without its trials and tribulations, has been a time of genuine celebration.

'The identity, ethos and purpose inspired by Bishop George Browning and the supporters he gathered around the project of the Centre remain alive and well today.'

In my talk to the parishioners of St John's, I illustrated the way that the Centre gives expression to its founding, and enduring, identity and purpose, centred around social inclusion, hospitality, interfaith dialogue, reconciliation with First Nations Australians and the study and expression of Australian Christianity (including through the creative arts), by simply listing the significant and diverse public events the Centre has hosted and/or sponsored this year: a multi-faith and multicultural Commonwealth Day celebration, an interfaith dialogue on faith and politics, a dialogue between the leader of the Iona Community in Scotland and First Nations Christian leaders on the topic of care for creation, a lecture series called "Theological Disputes," a concert series by renowned cellist, David Pereira, called "70 Not Out!" and the *Spiritus* Short Film Prize award night.

I also reflected on some of the activities I have been involved with in my capacity as Acting Executive Director, representing the Centre, in just the last month alone, which include attending the inaugural Faith-based Higher Education Summit at Parliament House, an interfaith prayer breakfast, also at Parliament House, and a Diwali celebration at Government House.

All these events have impressed upon me that the Centre really and truly does embody its rhetoric, through tangible acts of hospitality, dialogue, engagement, relationship-building, community participation and research. There is still much work to do, opportunities to be identified and pursued, achievements to pray for and work towards. But we can afford to be optimistic about leaving a positive mark on Australia over our second 25 years, grateful for the foundation and legacy upon which we have to build, thanks to those who came before us.

Dr Jonathan Cole

Acting Executive Director, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

25th Anniversary celebration at Government House

On Thursday 16 November, board members, directors, ambassadors, staff and friends of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture gathered at Government House for a special afternoon tea to celebrated the ACC&C's 25th anniversary, hosted by Their Excellencies the Governor-General David Hurley and his wife, Mrs Linda Hurley.



All photos by idphoto.com.au Irene Dowdy

Reflection of 25 years of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture



Bishop George Browning

ACC&C Ambassador

For almost 100 years following federation, the imposing Anglican site on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin in Barton sat empty, waiting, in expectation of a vision fulfilled. But what was that vision, and was it worthy of fulfilment?

All ACT land is leasehold. It was becoming abundantly clear that such a prominent unused lease on the edge of the parliamentary triangle could not be indefinitely retained, notwithstanding its perpetual lease. It should be returned to the nation for another purpose if there was to be no worthy implementation of its original purpose for a national Anglican cathedral.

Twenty-five years ago, and 100 years after federation, Australia is a very different nation. Those differences needed to be reflected in the national capital's iconic sites. Christian denominational allegiances, most often reflecting national or ethnic origins, no longer shape the nation as they had in the early days of settlement. Migration has brought to Australia expressions of belief and religious allegiance that need conversation and respect. Even more importantly, awareness of First Nations spirituality and connectedness to land has become central to our national identity, needing space, expression, and reconciliation. Colonial settlement had at best ignorantly, but at times maliciously, crushed what should have been cherished in Christ's name.

On this significant site it became urgent to find a way forward which might capture the spiritual aspirations and needs of contemporary Australia in a manner that could be hosted by the Christian Church. The obligation of the Anglican Church, the custodian of the site since federation, to serve the nation in the name of the God revealed to us in Jesus is as vital as ever. How could this be done?

Crucial conversations were held in the offices of then Governor General, Sir William Deane, at Yarralumla. From these offices a vision for an inclusive centre, hosted by the Christian faith was formed. From these offices a focus on reconciliation in all its dimensions was confirmed, inclusive of: reconciliation with First Nations peoples, fellowship across boundaries of Christian allegiance, conversation, hospitality and dialogue, cooperation with people of other faiths, and a place of exploration and inspiration for people of no particular belief.

While institutional religion has long been in decline, the need to secure a safe place for spiritual exploration, respect and inclusivity has never been more urgent. A much-vaunted secular society is not, and should not be, a society devoid of the

sacred. This vision captured the imagination of key partners, perhaps even surprising partners! The Federal Government gifted its lease along Kings Avenue for the fulfilment of this vision, followed quickly by the ACT government and its lease facing Bowen Drive. **The site as a larger whole was re-leased for the purposes of this vision, to be expressed under the title the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.**

Crucially, the most important partner became Charles Sturt University. Through its then Vice Chancellor, Cliff Blake, the University imagined a wonderful opportunity, through its core business of education, to engage the nation on a pathway towards **Wisdom for the Common Good.**

Few national capital cities anywhere in the world are blessed with a large and relatively open site on the edge of their parliamentary triangle, to reflect, serve and influence the nation's contemporary heart. We rightly honour past spiritual alignments and traditions, but they no longer define us as they once did. This panoramic site had been set aside for Anglicans because at that time the majority of the nation's citizens were so aligned. This is clearly no longer the case. It is urgent the site give expression to what the nation, at its best, might become. A nation embracing, as a gift, the centrality and uniqueness of its First Nations peoples and their spirituality of profound relatedness. A nation that cherishes its British foundations in democracy, the judiciary, governance and the rule of law, all of which assume a Christian foundation. A nation enriched by its multiculturalism and diverse spiritualities that can and should be in dialogue with one another for mutual enhancement and service of the national common good.

Much has been achieved in a relatively short period of time.

Listening to speeches in celebration of the Centre's 25th anniversary at Government House from Governor General David Hurley, Anglican Bishop Mark Short, CSU Vice-Chancellor Professor Renée Leon and ACC&C Board Chair Lin Hatfield Dodds, it is clear the vision, and excitement about opportunities to fulfil it, have not dimmed.

Neither the Anglican Church, nor the University are at liberty to do anything on the site that is not in keeping with its lease. On the other hand, it is simply unrealistic to expect either of the two main partners to invest in the site unless the outcome enhances the vision and mission of their different, but on this site, complementary institutions. This particularly applies to the University which has been the main investor on the site.

There is urgent need for both parties to re-vision the whole site as it might best serve this vision, including St Mark's, which sits alongside on a separate lease exclusive to the Diocese. This re-visioning could enormously enhance the opportunity for both partners to be at the centre of an enterprise with the capacity to capture the heart of the nation and shape its journey of continued becoming in the 21st century.

Wisdom is an elusive virtue. Yet, wisdom for the common good is a precious and necessary commodity if the nation is to become a place of genuine wellbeing for all its citizens and a partner with others for global peace and sustainability. The highest academic honour the university can bestow is Doctor of Philosophy (lover of wisdom). Blessed are those with courage and insight to light a candle in the darkness and point the way to national and individual fulness of life.



All photos by idphoto.com.au Irene Dowdy



Mr Clive Rodger photo by Liz Jakimow

Interview with Mr Clive Rodger

Liz Jakimow

Communications Officer, ACC&C

Mr Clive Rodger, a distinguished member of the board of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, will be retiring from the board at the end of this year. With an extensive tenure on the board since its establishment and prior involvement in the formation of the Centre, Clive possesses a wealth of knowledge about its history and development. In this interview, we had the pleasure of discussing the inception of the Centre, Clive's notable experiences as a board member, and his aspirations for its future.

How did the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture come to be established 25 years ago?

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture came into existence 25 years ago through the collective efforts of various individuals. The initial idea of constructing a grand church on the site was contemplated by Anglican dioceses across Australia during the late '80s and early '90s. However, it became evident that building an Anglican national church on that particular location was not suitable, considering the existence of a cathedral in Goulburn.

When Bishop George Browning assumed his role, he had a vision that the site might be used for the wider national Church – not just the Anglican Church, but Christianity in Australia. I was one of the people he asked to become involved. We started working on the development of what was initially known as a National Centre, which eventually became the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.

The core concept behind the Centre was to create a space that would serve the broader Church in Australia, representing Christianity's historical significance in our nation, while exploring its contemporary manifestations and being a venue for significant liturgical events. This vision which Bishop George Browning expressed resonated with others, generating considerable enthusiasm.

I worked with a team that included Ian Nicol, a partner at Blake Dawson Waldron, a leading legal firm. Other key individuals involved were Bishop Pat Power, Professor David Griffin, a botanist at ANU, and Margaret Reid, who became President of the Australian Senate. Together, we formed a working party that conceptualised the Centre, drafted a deed, and sought a suitable partner. We unanimously agreed that Charles Sturt University would be an ideal collaborator.

Our committee worked until 1998, when the deed was signed. We held regular meetings in Margaret Reid's office, where she chaired our discussions. Over the years, we developed a vision for the Centre, defined its purpose and objectives, and organised an architectural competition for construction of the Chapel. Two other key players were Lowitja O'Donoghue and the former Governor-General, Sir William Deane. They were very influential in providing advice and impetus to the vision for the Centre.

In your 25 years with the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, what were some standout moments?

One standout moment was the dinner we had with Charles Sturt University at the Commonwealth Club, with Dr David Asimus AO, the Chancellor of the University at the time, and Cliff Blake. They both chose lamb, and unfortunately the Commonwealth Club didn't have mint sauce, so one of the staff quickly went to a supermarket to get some. This discussion was significant as it brought Charles Sturt University on board. It worked well with the School of Theology, which had been established a few years earlier and formed within CSU. After the dinner, we entered a deed, and the University became increasingly engaged in the life of the Centre. They now provide administrative and financial support, which has increased over the years. It has been a wonderful partnership.

Another significant event was the Queen planting a tree on the site when she officially opened it. The opening of the Bible Garden and the labyrinth, which Sir William Deane opened, were also major events in the life of the Centre. Additionally, the interfaith events we've hosted, such as the iftar dinners in the Chapel, have been highlights for me.

How has the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture changed over the years?

Each executive director has left their mark on the Centre, shaping its activities and style. Dr David Millikan had a vision for the labyrinth and the Pilgrim Path and the development of a theology for the site. James Haire focused on interfaith dialogue, particularly with the Islamic community. He also brought national and international recognition to the Centre.

During Stephen Pickard's nine-year tenure as Executive Director, he introduced new programs, particularly in the arts. The *Spiritus* prize was established during his time, and the Centre hosted numerous artistic exhibitions. Stephen also engaged in prophetic witness through various statements and interviews.

Both James and Stephen were senior people in the Church of Australia, and highly regarded as theological educators. They gave the Centre standing in terms of theological undertaking and research, and were both involved in the Public and Contextual Theological Research Centre (PaCT).

Stephen also had a particular capacity to build partnerships, which was crucial considering the Centre's small staff. One of the great strengths of the Centre has been the ability to build and support these partnerships, including partnerships with organisations like A Chorus of Women, Christians for an Ethical Society, iftar dinners, and the Canberra Short Film Festival. Under Dr Jonathan Cole as Acting Executive Director, a lot of academic partnerships are being developed such as the Theology and Economics Workshop taking place in February next year.

How do you envision the Centre's role in the future, considering the changing landscape of Christianity in Australian society?

This is a very important question, because when the Centre was formed, Christianity represented almost two-thirds of the Australian population, and it now represents 44%. The rise in the number of people claiming no religion, currently at around 40%, along with secularisation and immigration, has significantly altered the religious framework and allegiances of the population. As a result, the Centre now operates as a minority rather than a majority, and we need to respect that.

Additionally, the reputation of the Church has been deeply impacted by issues such as sexual abuse, leading to a loss of trust and, at times, contempt from the community. The Royal Commission's criticism of the Church was devastating. So it is a very different environment to the mid-1990s when the Centre was established.

However, these changes highlight the need for a reasoned Christianity more than ever. I think it's going to be institutions like the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture that will take a lead role in restoring trust in Christianity. Despite the fundamental changes in the position of the Church and how it is perceived by the community, the Centre's importance remains paramount.

Christians for an Ethical Society (CES) and the *Spiritus* Film Prize are both initiatives you are involved in. Could you please explain the significance of these organisations and why you chose to dedicate your time and energy to them?

I've been chairing Christians for an Ethical Society (CES) for the past five years, and it aligns closely with the vision of the Centre. Through its forums and an annual dinner, it presents responses to critical issues, which for the past couple of years have focused on issues of justice and truth and mercy and what constitutes a good society. CES does not function as an advocacy group, but rather aims to assist Christians and others by providing a particular perspective on critical issues, encouraging engagement and well-reasoned arguments.



Clive Rodger at the HG Brennan Workshop in Economics and Theology, photo by Liz Jakimow

The *Spiritus* Short Film Prize, originally known as the Religious Short Film Prize, was established about ten years ago. My wife, Lynlea, and I have a deep interest in film, and we wanted to be involved in promoting a prize that encourages filmmakers, both Christians and others, to explore the important aspects of life and its meaning. Over the years, we have witnessed a vast improvement in the quality of the films submitted, and it has been a great delight for us to support the prize. It's been a great part of my life.

Additionally, I have a great interest in theological education, which led me to serve as the Chair of the Executive of St Mark's National Theological Centre for 30 years. While the School of Theology is somewhat independent from the Centre, both institutions are within Charles Sturt University. I believe that fostering a closer association between the Centre and St Mark's, sharing resources, and combining a vision for the common good would be mutually advantageous.

Looking ahead, what plans or aspirations do you have for the future? Are there any new projects that you hope to embark on or spend more time on? How do you see yourself continuing to contribute to the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture?

I currently chair an organisation called Embracing Ministries, which works with people with disabilities. We're organising a conference with international speakers in October next year. Additionally, I will be working to ensure that the recommendations and findings of the Royal Commission on Disability are properly understood by the Church, and appropriately implemented by Christian bodies.

I still see myself continuing to have a role at the Centre and believe I can continue to be a valuable resource. I will also likely be more present at Centre activities than I have been in the past, and will remain involved with the *Spiritus* Short Film Prize. Furthermore, I would be prepared to be involved in developing philanthropic support for the Centre.

If you were given the opportunity to host a dinner party and invite any six individuals, living or deceased, who would you choose and why?

1. **Jonathan Sachs** – He was the Chief Rabbi in the UK and one of the most profound thinkers I've come across. He is deeply imbued in the Hebrew Scriptures and what is happening in society.
2. **Prof Max Stackhouse** – When I studied at Princeton, I worked closely with Professor Max Stackhouse. I was doing my thesis under him, and he was just terrific as a mentor, somebody who was extremely widely read and who could develop a methodology in relation to Christian ethics. He was extremely influential.
3. **Gustavo Gutiérrez** – Gustavo Gutiérrez was a guest professor at Princeton and he had an absolutely profound impact. He was a man of about 4 foot 8 in height, but a man of immense power in terms of his understanding of the gospel. He offered much more understanding of what the Gospel was about in terms of supporting those in need.
4. **Dame Iris Murdoch** – I learned from Iris Murdoch that the complications of ethics are so great that it's best understood in narrative form rather than in propositional form. That essentially aligns very much with the teaching of Jesus. Stories make up the most profound way of understanding life and God's expectations.
5. **Edith Cowan** – Edith Cowan was a pioneer for women in the Australian Parliament, who blazed a trail for women, for reform and for significant issues that impact on our society.
6. **Laura Tingle** – ABC journalist, Laura Tingle, is a person who is very much in touch with what is happening in society and has deep thoughts about it and understands the broader trends. She would be a delightful contribution to the dinner party. She's made a significant contribution to Australian society.



25th Anniversary celebrations at Government House with Clive Rodger on far right, photo by idphoto.com.au Irene Dowdy



Photo by Liz Jakimow

The future of Christianity in Australia

Three perspectives by young people

We asked three young people what they thought about the future of Christianity in Australia. Below, you will find three very different views. Yet they all show a willingness and a commitment to see Christianity flourish, even if it means recognising that what worked in the past may not work in the future. These different perspectives also remind us that Christianity in the future is unlikely to be a one-size-fits-all approach. Just as all people are different, there may need to be different expressions of Christianity, meeting different needs. As we move into the future, Christianity in Australia is likely to look very different to how it has in the past. If it is going to continue to grow, we must listen to the voices of young people, as the future of Christianity is in their hands.



Hannah Pond (age 24)

The future of Christianity in Australia is, at its heart, ever-changing, yet unchanged.

That future will be shaped by the distinction between religion and Christianity, which are often seen as the same ideal, yet are experienced so differently at their cores. "Religion" is often seen as associated with church buildings and the religious practices conducted within them.

However, many church services are full of "Christians" whose relationship with God finishes every time they leave the building, and is only picked up again next time they enter. Yet there are many Christians who are not connected to a church building, yet share fellowship with God daily. This was the personal experience that formed my faith, as the Anglican parish in the small country town where I grew up could only afford to run services in our building once every two months.

Being a Christian is not only an agreement to attend church and be a "good" person. It is more than just belonging to a "religion" in name only. It is a lifelong commitment to learn more about God, shake off preconceived misunderstandings, and grow into a deeper relationship with God himself. My fear for the churches is that so many dedicated church members, who put all their energy into trying to reach those outside the church, forget to take care of their own relationship with God. Our churches forget to teach, strengthen, and grow those in the church, to help them build a relationship with their Creator. My fear is that there are Christians all over Australia who will die never truly knowing God, nor ever knowing there is more of him to know.

My hope for the future of Christianity is closely related. I hope that the discipleship of Christians will start inside the churches, inside religious circles. I desire Christianity in Australia to

move outside of the locked box so many of us live in, not truly grasping the truths we need to be taught: truths that are so often left out of sermons because they are seen as such common knowledge – yet they are not. For example, my mother was a Christian for more than 30 years, had attended church all her life, and attended countless church camps. All this was before she was told that she was saved through her belief in Christ's death for her. Until that moment she had believed that her salvation rested in her hands, that if she was good enough, if her good deeds were great enough, God might save her. She believed that God had done his half and now she had to do hers. This is unfathomable, yet it is the reality of countless avid Christians, devoted church members, and lifelong followers of Christ.

In the future, I hope that Christians within churches and Christians without churches will both have a relationship with Christ, and that all Christians will have a deeper knowledge of his truth, rather than misunderstood assumptions that no one has bothered to correct.

For Christianity in Australia to grow, to strengthen, and to survive, we must first pay attention to our own.

Charles Pitcher (age 23)

I grew up in a Christian family and went to a Christian school, but in Year 11-12 a church friend committed suicide, and another got kicked out of home by her Christian parents for coming out as bisexual. I started questioning faith, stopped attending, and became depressed and nihilistic.

Then I met a pastor called Caleb who invited me to Oliver Brown for hot chocolate with people my age, not talking about God, just hanging out in a comfortable environment. Though I was depressed, I would leave these social hangs feeling comforted and uplifted. And in the last five minutes Caleb would do a short talk in a super open way: "even if you're not a Christian, I believe this will be helpful to you in your life."

Then I joined a team that went to a bridge in Tuggeranong and handed out red frogs to 16-17 year olds who were hanging out. I got chatting to this kid whose dad was in a bikie gang, and I felt that I could help these people. It's not why you should serve, but I started feeling good from serving. So I joined a Connect Group, and Caleb identified my gifts and asked me if I wanted to be youth coordinator.



Impact Church wants to be a church for the unchurched. I relate to that because I didn't have any Christian mates: my friends are unchurched, but I feel really comfortable inviting them to Oliver Brown. Because uni students don't like to go far, and they love food, we started "Sunday Sessions" in Braddon with the Catholic ANU chaplain: there's a Catholic mass (which I didn't attend but brought a lot of young Catholic people), followed by a Pentecostal service, and then chicken wings – it broke down misconceptions we had about each other, and became a hot spot which is easy to invite young adults to after Red Frogs.

Thinking about the wider picture, it's easier to start with negatives. I know people who are culturally Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, but few cultural Christians. Many people brought up in the church have fallen away, seeing it as a rule-based thing, even though they respect Muslim people for following a certain rule. My mates talk to me about the bad things the church has done, you know: "paedophile". It's hard to be a Christian today in Australia without a strong community that supports you.

I've also never understood the barriers between Christians. I was disheartened when I met a student who was Catholic and we were having a really good chat until suddenly he found I was a Protestant and he just left. That really took me aback – I thought we were supposed to be the non-judgemental ones!

Churches will always have their brands, but we can work together and make connections through programs like Red Frogs and Sunday Sessions: a bunch of different people who were once considered enemies, working together for a common mission.

On the positive side, people are supposedly more open to spiritual experiences than 20 years ago. At the same time, there is so much uncertainty when you're over-exposed to everything all the time and people have too many choices. We held a debate recently at ANU between a secular philosopher and a Christian philosopher who came to pretty similar conclusions about the meaning of life. So Christian values are still plausible, but people need to find a place where it's real to them. I hope to see more people who understand the different options, can calmly explain what Christians believe in a non-judgemental way, and integrate people into open-ended groups that support them.

Jack Palmer (age 24)

Christianity in Australia is shrinking. That's the reality of it. My grandparents grew up in an Australia, a Ukraine, a Britain, where being Christian was the norm. That's no longer the case. We can bemoan it, or we can work with it. The idea that church is a thing you go to on Sunday mornings doesn't appeal as much to young people. Couple that with sexual abuse scandals and hatred that's often seen as coming from all Christianity as a whole rather than individuals or small groups, and it's hard to see why attending church would appeal to a young person in modern Australia. What's taking its place, though, isn't a lack of faith, but differently shaped communities. Home churches and small groups are a great way to engage in a way that better fits around people's lives, rather than forcing them to conform to a traditional schedule. The outlook looks good, if the church keeps up.

Jesus taught us one command above all others: to love each other as he loved us. That's a message few will disagree with. Who doesn't want to see more love in this world? If the core message, the most important part of the Bible, isn't getting across, what is? Christianity should be about love and kindness. That's a message that resonates with people. Getting bogged down in details doesn't.

The church is old. I know I'm not exactly making a ground-breaking statement there, but it needs to be said. There are a lot of traditions practiced by different churches that just don't resonate with young people. A congregation can meet on a Sunday morning and sing their hymns if they like, but there's not much of a future in that. Small groups on a weekday evening can fit around our lives instead of dictating them.

So what's the future of Christianity in Australia? It's smaller, more fragmented, and centred on the core message that Jesus taught us. It's home church and bible study. Willing to fit around our lives instead of assuming we can attend on Sunday, and most importantly, it's about kindness and love, not hate and division.



Christianity should be about love and kindness. That's a message that resonates with people. Getting bogged down in details doesn't.



First Nations and Creation Care Pilgrimage with Wellspring and the Iona Community

Brooke Prentis

Wakka Wakka woman, Aboriginal Christian Leader, Wellspring Community member, and Coordinator of the Grasstree Gathering

Last year, in October 2022, I had a phone conversation with Dr Diane Speed AM, inviting me to participate as a curator of an online seminar discussion to hear from Aboriginal Christian Leaders on the theme of “Identity and Country in a First Nations Context” being held by the Wellspring Community.

I had connection with the Wellspring Community through my dear friends Neil Holm and Margaret Holm (dec), who had been long-time supporters of Aboriginal ministry and were members of the Wellspring Community, and I had been a guest speaker at the national gathering of the Wellspring Community in 2019. In my conversation with Diane, I heard that the Wellspring Community was embarking on a pilgrimage in 2023 across these lands now called Australia and wanted to listen to First Nations peoples with a focus on Creation Care with The Rev Ruth Harvey, the leader of the Iona Community. I was intrigued and interested. Fast forward to 29 September 2023 and a month-long pilgrimage commenced of which I co-led with Ruth and with Lisa Wriley and Joy Connor, the co-leaders of the Wellspring Community.

The Wellspring Community was founded in 1992 and is about “where spirituality and justice meet”, an Australia-wide Christian ecumenical community inspired by the Iona Community and the Iona Community being a dispersed community of people working for peace and justice.

In a year where we seemingly returned to a pre-COVID era and in a year of an Australian Referendum, and perhaps my whole life, I have thirsted for the places where spirituality and justice meet. I had heard people who had been to Iona or had been interested in Celtic spirituality talk of “thin places”. As an Aboriginal person, a Wakka Wakka woman, I know my places of cultural and spiritual significance, and have been to other Aboriginal peoples nation and Country, to places of cultural and spiritual significance. I’ll never forget being with Aunty Rev Dr Denise Champion on her Country, Adnyamathanha Country, in Ikara, the Flinders Ranges, watching the sun rise in the place of the Adnyamathanha story of the first sunrise. Aboriginal places of cultural and spiritual significance are always a reminder of, as Aunty Rev Dr Denise Champion says in her book “Yarta Wandatha”, “the land of Australia is like one gigantic storybook.” The Creator’s story is embedded in the landscape.

But places of cultural and spiritual significance in these lands now called Australia also hold the shared story of the last 250 years. And so, on 29 September, the First Nations and Creation Care Pilgrimage began in Boorloo, Perth and especially started as we stepped off the boat on to Wadjemup, Rottnest Island, Nyungar/Noongar Country.

The Pilgrimage had us walk softly and gently on these ancient lands now called Australia across Noongar Country to Kurna Country and Ngarrindjeri Country to Arrernte Country, to Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung Country, Gunaikurnai Country, to Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country, to Cammeraygal Country of the Eora nation, to Gundungarra and Dharug Country, to Gadigal Country of the Eora nation, to Darkinjung and Guringai Country, to Turrabul and Yuggera Country and finishing on 1 November 2023 on Quandamooka Country. So that is to Perth, Rottnest Island, Adelaide, Raukkan, Mwarparntwe/Alice Springs, Naarm/Melbourne, Gragin/Raymond Island, Gippsland, Canberra, Chatwood, Warrang/Sydney, the Blue Mountains, the Central Coast, Newcastle, Meanjin/Brisbane, The Gap Brisbane, and Coochiemudlo Island. From Western Australia to South Australia to the Northern Territory, to Victoria, to the ACT, to New South Wales, to Queensland.

Many people of all cultures joined us on the way and we were led by incredible Aboriginal Traditional Owners, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders. I take a moment to honour all of these leaders and encourage you to get to know them: Uncle Neville Collard, Della Rae Morrison, Uncle Frank Wanganeen, Uncle Allen Edwards, Uncle Nelson Varcoe, Bishop Chris McLeod, Uncle Clyde Rigney, Aunty Rosemary Rigney, Uncle Ken Sumner, Aunty Bev O’Callaghan, Dr Kathleen Wallace, Shirleen McLaughlin, Aunty Elaine, Doreen, Rob Morrisson, Rev Canon Rhyllis Andy, Rev Kathy Dalton, Cath Thomas, Shay, Uncle Tony Linton, Aunty Sally Fitzgerald, Samantha Faulkner, Uncle Dr Pastor Ray Minniecon, Aunty Ali Golding, Aunty Beryl Oploo, David “Dingo” King, Tim Selwyn, Aunty Jean Phillips, and Uncle Alex Davidson.

The bible verse I carried with me on the pilgrimage is one I have written theologically on before in my chapter, "What Can the Birds of the Land Tell Us?", in the book, *Grounded in the Body, in Time and Place, in Scripture: Papers by Australian Women Scholars in the Evangelical Tradition*, Job 12:7-10:

- ⁷ "But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
- ⁸ or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.
- ⁹ Which of all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
- ¹⁰ In his hand is the life of every creature
and the breath of all mankind.

Country, as I say and teach, is all lands, waters, sky, trees, plants, animals, birds, fish, rocks, mountains and all peoples. The pilgrimage had us connecting and deep listening to Country. We found places where spirituality and justice meet.

It was times like on Wajemup where the cuteness of the Quokka called with the clinking of the chains and the haunting of the Aboriginal prisoners where tourists unknowingly cycle past an Aboriginal burial ground. Or on Kaurna Country where the Eastern Rosella called me to the water springs of the tears of Tjilbruke Dreaming and brought together creation and the sadness of the Pool of Tears and the grieving mother at Colebrook Stolen Generations home. Or at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in front of the Holy Spirit, the white owl, of the Gija people. Or sitting beside Samantha Faulkner hearing poetry of the Torres Strait Islands with the terror of the rising sea levels effect on land, language and culture. Or the lookouts with the grasstrees and the rocks and the mountains on Gundangarra Country in the Blue Mountains.



Ruth Harvey in the Bible Garden, photo by Liz Jakimow

Or the fish of Sydney Harbour recalling the woman Barangaroo of the Eora Fisherwoman on Gadigal Country – Gadi Grasstree – gal peoples – Gadigal – the peoples of the grasstree. The critically endangered, Far Eastern Curlew, whose wetlands are at risk of being destroyed due to a property development on Quandamooka Country.

The pilgrimage enabled the unique and important opportunity to listen, to learn, to share and to connect with, and build, community. As I say, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice and Creation and Climate justice cannot be separated. As the Wellspring Community and Iona Community have led the way, may we all listen to, and be led by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in these lands now called Australia, seeking out the places where spirituality and justice meet, and finding a way together to face and take action in a time of climate crisis.

FB & Instagram @brookeprentis.official and website www.brookeprentis.com

FB @wellspringaustralia, Instagram @wellspringcommunity_australia and website <https://wellspring-community.com/>

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From left to right: Joy Connor, Jonathan Cole, Toni Hassan, Sally Fitzgerald, Brooke Prentis, Ruth Harvey.



Toni Hassan, Sally Fitzgerald, Joy Connor, Samantha Faulkner, Brooke Prentis and Ruth Harvey, photo by Liz Jakimow



Presentation to the Pope

Virginia Miller

Adjunct Research Fellow, ACC&C

I was most fortunate recently to present my book, *Child Sexual Abuse Inquiries and the Catholic Church: Reassessing the Evidence*, to Pope Francis in Rome.

I did so as an attendee of a conference for leaders and lawmakers in the Catholic Church. In the private audience, I had enough time to explain the contents of my book to the Pope as well as my motivation for writing it. The response of the spiritual leader of some two billion Catholics worldwide was very positive and validated my efforts to get at the truth in this controversial area. Indeed, I have now received numerous letters and other messages of support from cardinals, bishops, provincial leaders of religious orders, and academics. The consistent message of support regarding the book concerns the objective nature of the reporting.

Indeed, it could be said that it is *de rigueur* in the Catholic Church in Rome to be measured, moderate and certainly not driven by ideology. Take for example, Cardinal Ladaria Ferrer's response to the claim that he is a theological centrist: "...I don't like extremisms, either progressive, or traditionalist ones. I believe that there is a *via media*, which is taken by the majority of professors of Theology in Rome and in the Church in general, which I think is the correct path to take..."¹ This position is also consistent with Pope Francis' outlook, notwithstanding claims that he is a progressive ideologue. Consider John Allen's review of the book *Heaven and Hell*, a dialogue between the Argentinian Rabbi Abraham Skorka and Pope Francis. In this review, Allen claims that the overriding impression of Pope Francis is that he is a moderate realist.² Or James Keane's assessment of the Pope in the article titled, "Pope Francis is not a liberal! (He's not a conservative either)." In this article, Keane argues that any Catholic who is trying to live his or her life as an authentic Catholic will not fit into contemporary US political categories, especially ideologically-based political categories. In relation to Pope Francis, he argues: "Those who might call Pope Francis a liberal might note that he is vehemently opposed to legal abortion...he has been a public critic of gender theory and gender reassignment surgery... He has affirmed that the Church has no authority to ordain women..."³ Keane's argument that a Catholic cannot fit into neat ideologically-based political categories would seem to be correct.

However, it is not correct to suggest that Pope Francis is a progressive ideologue at heart, who has curtailed his liberal views because he is restricted by Catholic doctrine. On the contrary, I think it is right to say that Pope Francis, like most Catholics in Rome, is a moderate who favours the middle way and deliberately avoids political ideology. In this respect, Pope Francis is surely displaying one of the most important characteristics of an authentic leader. Demagogues and other leaders who endorse and exploit ideology, whether of the left or the right, have always done, and continue to do, enormous damage to the communities they lead, not the least by their polarising effect. This polarising effect is evident in the US today, but also to a lesser extent in Australia. Indeed, I would suggest that this polarising effect is present even among Christians in Australia and, as such, a matter to be addressed by Christian leaders seeking a *via media*.

This view of the *via media* in the Church is certainly present in the Synod of Synodality that is currently underway. Indeed, it is hoped that this process of walking together and listening to one another will transcend ideological positions in favour of positions that truly express the authentic nature of the Church and many Catholics who take this middle path. This is not to say that Catholics should forget about their individuality. In the second part of Cardinal Ladaria Ferrer's comment about the *via media*, he remarks: "...each of us has his own peculiarities, because, thanks be to God, we do not repeat, we are not clones."⁴ However, it is to say that individuality and our authentic expression is often lost when we embrace ideology of any kind.

1. Cardinale, Gianni [30Giorni | A Jesuit at the former Holy Office \(Interview with Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer by Gianni Cardinale\)](#)
2. John Allen [Book indicates pope is a moderate realist | National Catholic Reporter \(ncronline.org\)](#)
3. James Keane [Pope Francis is not a liberal! \(He's not a conservative either.\) | America Magazine](#)
4. Cardinale, Gianni [30Giorni | A Jesuit at the former Holy Office \(Interview with Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer by Gianni Cardinale\)](#)



Virginia Miller presenting her book to Pope Francis, photo supplied by author

“...Pope Francis, like most Catholics in Rome, is a moderate who favours the middle way and deliberately avoids political ideology.”



2023 Spiritus Short Film Prize Awards

Lynlea Rodger

Spiritus Short Film Prize sponsor

Readers of *Engage* and supporters of the Centre are aware of the Centre's vision to engage with Australian society with hearts and minds towards the common good, within a narrative grounded in hope. One of the ways this vision has been enacted is through the now annual awarding of the *Spiritus* Short Film Prize, an award for a short Australian film (up to 10 minutes) sponsored under the aegis of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture and Charles Sturt University. Criteria for the awarding of prizes, additional to artistic merit and technical skilfulness, include human and planetary flourishing and the development of themes that explore human consciousness, including the transcendent dimensions of human life and human flourishing.

Over the past few years, the prize has been awarded at Dendy Cinemas within the framework of a valued partnership with the Canberra Short Film Festival. The larger Canberra Short Film Festival, ably co-ordinated by John Frohlich and Adi Watters, received 800 entries from 49 countries. This year for the first time the ACC&C had its own event within the festival where the films entered for *Spiritus* were shown, winners announced and prizes awarded at a Dendy Cinema *Spiritus* Short Film Prize Award event. Drinks and hospitality followed with an opportunity to chat and mingle with young filmmakers, support crew and with other movie goers.

The hush in the theatre at the end of the viewing of the nine films was palpable. The films were assessed by a panel of judges appointed by the ACC&C Board and in their review they commented that this year the field was particularly strong.

The viewing was bookended by films depicting indigenous stories drawing strong connections between country, identity and spirit. *Cry of the Glossy* was a cry from nature itself for habitat and places within which to feed, to shelter and to give voice to country. That every species/habitat loss is a loss to the voice and strength of country was a powerful message

of this film. *Healing Heart Feeling Country* was an achingly beautiful viewing and hearing of country, highlighting the interconnection of all things, and environments under stress. "Accomplished and visually beautiful", it was awarded the Regional Australia Prize.

Connection and disconnection were themes explored in very different ways in the films *New Life* and *The Entrepreneur*. The simple graphics and line drawings of *New Life* shifted the character and the viewer in a moving and powerful way through the experiences of conflict and displacement, transition and fear, arrival and rejection, despair and light.

In *The Entrepreneur* we meet the inimitable Emma, a young woman who, with her supporters, focuses not on her "disabilities" but on her singular ability. Enter Master Shredder, an entrepreneurial business hugely valued and respected in her hometown of Townsville, where Emma's non-verbal and non-literacy becomes a unique advantage in the handling and shredding of the highly confidential material being disposed of *in situ* in the offices of her clients. All speak glowingly of the contribution Emma is making to their lives and businesses: "We don't speak Auslan", one principal of a legal firm says, "we speak Emma".

For its powerful message of determination and persistence against the odds, and its uplifting and heart-warming story the film was Highly Commended by the judges.

Discrimination, in the form of racism and religious intolerance, was dealt with in a very different way in the film, *A Lift in Faith*. Three young women are caught in the claustrophobia of a stalled lift. Within a tight frame of the cramped lift the story of cross-cultural suspicion and hostility is told, along with forbearance and generosity on the part of the outsider, a young woman in a headscarf. The judges commented on a message clearly conveyed without being forced, in what is cinematically a polished work.



Photo: Gabrielle Grégoire, receiving Commendation for her film *Soul*, photo by Sarah Stitt

Themes of displacement and fitting in are explored through another lens in the film, *Ode to My Denim Jacket*, the immigrant story of a loving Filipino family where the parents sacrifice significantly to enable their daughter to buy a denim jacket to help her feel she fits in with her peers. The story explores the costs of love, of evaluating what connections matter, and how and where we decide to fit in.

The film with the title *Soul* is a reminder of how this word has vacated common Australian vocabulary. A generation ago the inaugural ACC&C Executive Director, Rev Dr David Millikan, wrote a book and made a film titled *The Sunburnt Soul*, an exploration of Australian spirituality. The struggle for freedom is core to this film alongside the importance of finding one's way and holding one's values in difficult circumstances. The filmmaker has achieved a contemporary form of inventive expression about identity with the film being commended by the judges.

Forgiveness is a theme central to the Judeo-Christian traditions, but not exclusively so. The film is named by the Malay word for forgiveness, *Kemaafan*. It has as its characters members of a Muslim family, who are experiencing deep conflict as to whether the person at the centre of a series of events which disabled a key family member is forgivable. Intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict, prayer and, ultimately, reconciliation unfold within this film, the sole international film at the screening.

The nature of family loyalty and the conflicts this creates for the aspirations of different family members is explored in a very compassionate way in the film, *The Choice to Love*, which is the winner of the 2023 *Spiritus* Open Prize. A subtle film one of the judges wrote: "writing, acting, cinematography and editing are all polished". It meets the criteria for the prize of high artistic achievement and technical quality as well as being an absorbing story. The film is publicly available in Australia through SBS On Demand.

The Centre expresses its gratitude to the judges who again stepped up to assess the films, judge the winners and make recommendations as to other awards. A big thank you to Greg Battye, retired professor of Media Studies at the University of Canberra, Maximo Gowland, Argentine Ambassador and cultural attaché to Miami for several years, and ACC&C Board member and journalist, Genevieve Jacobs.

In presenting the prizes at the conclusion of the screening, *Spiritus* sponsors Clive and Lynlea Rodger expressed pleasure at the quality of the films submitted for consideration. They drew attention to how film, a crucial part of our technology and culture and ways of knowing and communicating, provides possibilities for human creativity in numbers of ways. These include providing windows into worlds we know nothing about, meeting characters and situations which expand the potential for empathy and deeper dives into cross-cultural meeting and understanding. Films have the potential to tap into a common humanity, a counter voice and counter power to what are now strong forces for stereotyping, simplistic narratives and deceitful devices which debase thinking skills and promote propaganda. Rich films lead awareness on a path of discovery—about place, about subject, about understanding more deeply our perceptions—through encounter with another's. So diarise November 2024 for a captivating window into rich Australian talent and the consciousness, expressed in film, of the emergent generation of young filmmakers.

The Board expresses its appreciation to ACC&C staff and to Sarah Stitt for the enrichment of the partnership with the Canberra Short Film Festival and for co-ordinating the many practicalities of organising the films for *Spiritus* and the logistics of the Award event, which was offsite. Partnerships are key to the ethos of ACC&C, as is active participation within the marketplaces of Australian culture/s and society.



Parents and crew of the Open winner, *The Choice to Love* by Anna Dvorak, photo by Clive Rodger



Remembering Glenda Cloughley, 1952-2023

Sarah Stitt and Dr Janet Salisbury

A Chorus of Women, ACC&C Artists-in-residence

With great sadness, we report that our dear friend, Glenda Cloughley – composer/singer with A Chorus of Women, Jungian analyst and well-known creative and prophetic voice for peace, human rights and environmental issues – peacefully passed away on the International Day of Peace, 21 September 2023, surrounded by her loving family. In January this year Glenda was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive cancer. During the months that followed, she mindfully, with grace and compassion, nurtured all those around her through her illness until her passing.

As her son Danny expressed, “if there is anyone who can travel with you on this journey to dying, it would be my mother.” Glenda traversed this path in the same manner in which she lived her whole life – with strength, beauty and love, with care and respect, with generosity, friendship and inclusiveness, sharing wisdom, mentoring and nurturing her family and friends through their grief.

The Chorus of Women, who have been artists-in-residence at the ACC&C since 2016, started on 18 March 2003, when Glenda invited Canberra women to join her in the Marble Foyer of the Australian Parliament House to sing a lament for the people of Iraq then facing invasion. One hundred and fifty women turned up to await the signal of a lone voice, Judith Clingan, singing out: “Open the doors of the chambers”, and Glenda responding: “of your hearts”. The women then sang into history the “Lament” with words written by Glenda and music by Judith. The action was a media sensation around the world. With characteristic insight, Glenda had written into the mood of the time, when tens of thousands of Australians had rightfully marched in protest against the war—polls indicated that 75% were against Australia’s involvement.

From that time, Glenda continued to write into her unflinching passion for peace and her determination for human and environmental justice. This year the Chorus women have been

celebrating 20 years of singing “wisdom for the common good” into the public arena— singing to bring about the awareness of climate change, and the human impact on the environment, singing about refugees and issues surrounding social justice, singing up peace.

Glenda’s compositions and creative initiatives reflect her Jungian practice, academic studies in social ecology and psychology and deep interest in European archaeomythology.

An abiding theme has been that the harmony we all seek can be found in the natural cycles of death and renewal, which are the source of our common humanity – in turn expressed in what she called “the wellsprings” of human love and kindness. This theme can be seen through her many compositions, including “The Web – After the Fire” (2004), written following the devastating Canberra fires of 2003, “The Hymn to Gaia” (2006), which quotes a translation from a *Homeric Hymn to the Earth* and was first performed by the Chorus at the ACC&C during an interfaith climate change event – “For the Love of Earth”.

Glenda’s first major choral and dramatic work, *The Gifts of the Furies*, was composed and performed several times between 2008 and 2011. This is Glenda’s big work about relations between people and Earth. Based on ancient Greek mythology, it recognises the mythic scale of climate change and warns that the laws of nature are far more powerful than the laws of people and what will occur if our hubris ignores them – “I’ll bring drought and fire under filthy skies, I’ll scorch the farmland and torch the forest, I’ll raise the oceans, drown the cities. I’ll spare no human being ...” – the Furies warned.

She also wrote for our city, “I am Ethos” (2007), inspired by Canberra’s first civic artwork, the sculpture *Ethos* (1961), by Tom Bass. In 2005, Glenda asked Tom what Ethos might have to tell Canberrans today? Tom got back to Glenda shortly after to say that Ethos had come to him in a dream and Glenda composed music for the words that Tom relayed to her.



Photo: Dr Glenda Cloughley in the Marble Foyer of the Australian Parliament House, 21 March 2023, photo by Barbara Baikie

Tom had a brass plaque cast with Ethos's words and then Chief Minister John Stanhope agreed for it to be placed in the paving by Ethos's statue in Civic Square.

Glenda also wrote for our parliaments, "Sing out Wisdom!" (2007, revised 2023), yet to be performed, and "The Singing Hill" (2022), which the Chorus took into Parliament House in November 2022 when the Women's Climate Congress presented their *Charter for Change* to several women politicians – Labor, Liberal, the Greens and Independents.

One evening in about 2013, following a weekly Chorus philosophy meeting, Glenda posed the thought that possibly every Australian family had in some way been touched by the trauma of war. Again, Glenda had tapped into the spirit of our time, the *zeitgeist*. During this time, Australia – at the behest of our then prime minister, Tony Abbott – was gearing up to a five-year commemoration of the centenary of the First World War, the centrepiece being the 1915 Gallipoli landing, where he believed and promulgated that Australia had come of age. As an alternative to the hype of war commemorations Glenda proposed writing for peace.

Concurrently with the 1915 Gallipoli landing another significant lesser-known historic event took place – the sole peace congress of WWI, out of which the Women's International

League for Peace and Freedom was founded and was also celebrating a centenary. Glenda composed her second major work, *A Passion for Peace*, which she called a "community oratorio", to tell this story. A focus of this work is in the words of US social reformer, Jane Addams, the 1915 International Congress of Women's President:

"Peace is not merely an absence of war,
Peace is the nurture of human life,
Yes, peace is the nurture of life."

In November 2014, A Chorus of Women presented the work-in-progress performance of *A Passion for Peace* to a full house in the ACC&C Chapel. The completed work was premiered as the centrepiece of a five-day Festival for Peace, which the Chorus hosted in Albert Hall from 27 April – 1 May 2015. It was at this time that the then ACC&C Executive Director, The Rt. Rev'd Professor Stephen Pickard, invited the Chorus to be artists-in-residence. He writes: "What a privilege it has been to have known Glenda, her generous and loving heart, her many remarkable gifts, and the passion she brought to all her endeavours, the planet and its peoples she deeply cared for. She died as she lived, in peace and with grace, a blessing to all who knew her. The Centre and its work have been greatly enriched by her wisdom, music and song."

Glenda's creative vision has touched the lives of many in Canberra and beyond and she will be greatly missed. At 2pm on Wednesday 13 December the Chorus women with Glenda's family will host, Remembering Glenda, in the ACC&C Chapel. All are welcome to attend to share in Glenda's gifts to us, and our loss.

Photo by Liz Jakimow



Exploring grief through the arts

Liz Jakimow

Communications Officer, ACC&C

When it comes to thinking about the big issues (suffering, God, life, death), nobody really has the answers. Philosophers and theologians may provide us with their arguments, but even the best of these have some degree of uncertainty. When these issues touch us personally, any attempt to reach a conclusion can sometimes seem inappropriate. Instead, we want to explore the pain and the possibility of unanswered questions. We want to express our emotions: our pain, our doubts and our grief. We want to wrestle with God, rather than have him speak to us from a burning bush.

The creative arts allow us to sit with the uncertainty of not knowing. Its purpose is not so much to reach a particular point of view, but to evoke deep reflection or emotion. It is an exploration that often ends in a question-mark.

The Bible itself does not always provide easy answers. In the Psalms, King David voices his pain and feelings of abandonment, but also includes expressions of faith. While David may occasionally reach conclusions, it is the exploration itself, and the tension between pain and hope, that is the focus. His chosen method of poetry lends itself to this in a way that more narrative literary styles cannot. In the same way, creative arts now can explore Christian concepts in ways unsuitable for a theological essay or sermon.

Recently, someone very close to me passed away. I had lost people I loved before, but the grief from this death affected me in a way I had never previously experienced. People offered platitudes, as they often do. Yet they seemed meaningless and failed to give me the assurance I so desperately wanted. I finally realised I was searching for answers, but there are no easy answers when it comes to death. We may form conclusions, based on faith and reason. But in the end, none of us really knows. All we have are questions.

It was then that I turned to the creative arts, not just to explore the questions that were troubling me, but also as a form of healing. Through creativity, my pain and grief were not something to be “managed” or “cured”, but could be expressed in their full form. While I do not write a lot of poetry, I do tend to return to it when I am dealing with heavy emotions. Poetry gave voice to the thoughts endlessly running through my mind, in a more productive way than dwelling on them or telling them to a friend and have them trying to “fix” me.

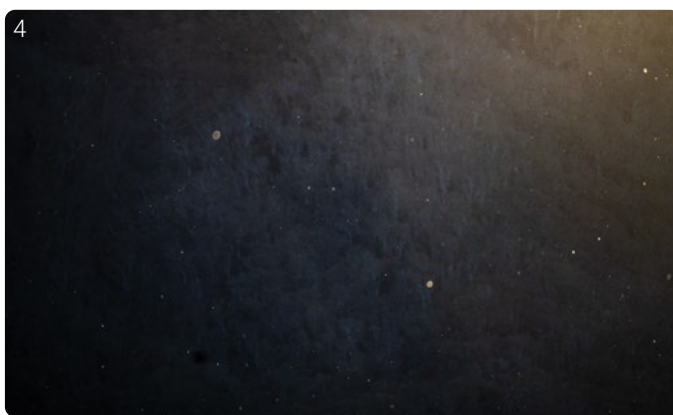
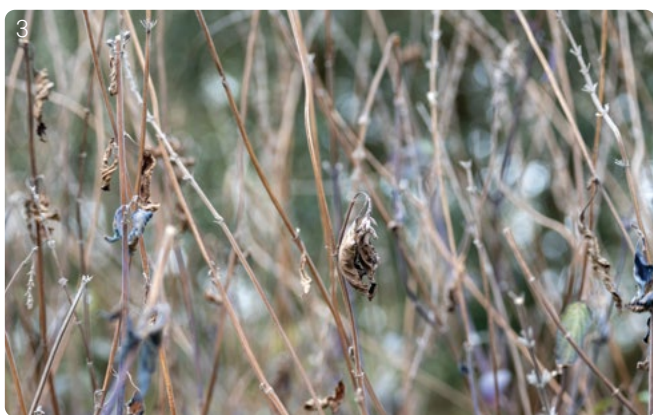
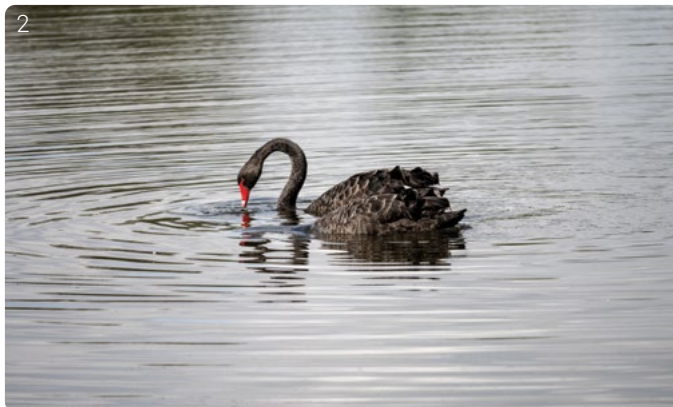
I also decided I would take a photograph every day. The same scenes I saw all the time appeared different through the lens of grief. In taking photos, I found that I was not so much “capturing” what was seen, but “interpreting” it and, in a way,

letting the world (and perhaps God) speak to me. When I take photos, I am often so caught up in the process that my thoughts and fears get pushed to one side. This meditative element enabled me to sit comfortably with my grief in a way that seemed almost impossible at any other time. For the first few days, the only time that I stopped crying was when I had a camera in my hand.

The poetry continues but is not as frequent as it was in the early stages. The photography, on the other hand, has become a daily necessity. Sometimes I am not sure whether it is an expression of my creativity or a form of therapy. Taking photos has also forced me to look at how my surroundings are changing, and find beauty in what I see. In the midst of my mourning, the new life of Spring has started. Buds have appeared on the trees, which turned into blossoms. Soon they will become fruit. Baby animals, such as bunnies and kangaroos, can be seen all around my house. There is a different smell to the air. On my best days, it feels a bit like hope.

I have created a collection of photos that I took during the first three-months of grieving, which I have titled “A journey with grief”. The photos have been grouped in different themes: Darkness Falls, Life and Death, Missing You, Time is Fleeting, Searching for Signs and Glimpses of Hope. “Darkness Falls” includes photos that seemed to speak to the sadness and devastating feeling of loss I was feeling at the time. “Life and death” included photos where life and death come together in nature. “Missing you” were photos that spoke of absence, or that perhaps suggested a loneliness. “Time is fleeting” spoke to the brevity of our time here on earth, and how quickly our time with someone can pass. “Searching for signs” showed the way those who are grieving often search the world around them for signs that their loved one is still around. “Glimpses of hope” is the last of my themes, capturing those times when my photography reminded me that nature is beautiful, and that there is hope even in the midst of grieving.

While this seems to suggest that one moves from one “stage” to the other, in reality grief goes in and out of all these stages all the time. If the photos had been grouped chronologically, it would have presented a very different picture, with all five stages represented in almost every week. That is why I have called the collection “A journey *with* grief” rather than “A journey *through* grief”, for grief is not something someone travels through in order to get to the other side. It is something they travel with, perhaps for a lifetime, and all five themes will present themselves at various times.



1. Darkness Falls

As I was driving home to Araluen, I noticed that the shadows falling across the Valley were quite dramatic at that time. These shadows seemed to reflect my grief and sadness and sense of loss.

Shadows across the valley, photo by Liz Jakimow

3. Life and death

This photo was taken at the grasslands at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. The dried plants looked quite depressing, seeming to capture my mood. And yet there is also beauty there, and hope – for we know that this area will come alive again.

Dry grasslands, photo by Liz Jakimow

Exhibition details

'A journey with grief: exploring grief through photography and poetry' will be displayed at the Chapel, 15-18 February and 22-25 February 2024. The exhibition is open from 10.30-3.30.

Opening night - 6.30pm, Wednesday 14 February 2024.

2. Missing You

At first glance, it looks like there is only one swan in this photo. A closer look, however, reveals that there are two swans, but one has its head underwater. This spoke of feeling someone still beside me, even though they were not "visible" in my earthly realm anymore.

Two swans, photo by Liz Jakimow

4. Searching for signs

This photo was taken in late afternoon, when bugs flying around in the sunlight streaming over the mountains could be seen as little specks of white – almost like fairies or some kind of spiritual presence. I changed the settings on my camera to give it a more ethereal and less realistic quality, indicating the way that those who have lost someone often search for signs, and sometimes the "real" world feels less important than the spiritual realm.

Dancing lights, photo by Liz Jakimow



Theological Disputes

Jonathan Cole

Acting Executive Director, ACC&C

This year, the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture has been developing a research community through a new lecture series called “Theological Disputes”. The lecture series provides researchers from the ACC&C, Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society (CRES) and School of Theology an opportunity to give a paper prepared for publication to their peers.

The lectures are held monthly at lunchtime and each paper is followed by a thirty-minute discussion. The lectures are invitation only as they are designed for Canberra-based CSU researchers in theology and religious studies. The quality of discussion, by all accounts, has been very high and our researchers, both those giving the paper and those attending, have found the lecture series invaluable. A core group of scholars attend every lecture and give papers, helping to create an intimate and supportive research culture aimed at encouraging each other in research excellence.

For those unable to attend in person, the Centre has made recordings of the lectures available on its [YouTube](#) channel, which I encourage you to visit. Although the recordings do not include the Q&A sessions, they still provide a valuable opportunity for a wider audience, including supporters of the ACC&C, to learn about, benefit from and engage with the interesting and diverse research our scholars are producing.

We have held eight lectures this year on a variety of fascinating topics. Dr Peter Hooton inaugurated the series with his lecture on “Embodying the transcendent: on the way to a global ethic”, exploring the need for a global response to the threats facing life on Earth. Dr John Painter revisited the gospel of John’s prologue, challenging traditional interpretations. Emeritus Professor Wayne Hudson delved into “New religious thought”, discussing the need to move beyond historical religious concepts and explore more contemporary perspectives.

Dr Nikolai Blaskow looked at Friedrich Nietzsche’s impact on art, philosophy and religion, shedding light on the complexities of our Western understanding of a “rules-based order”. Rev’d Dr Peter Grundy examined Wittgensteinian grammar and its relationship to theological limits, offering insights into the dynamic interplay between language and religious expression.

Dr Amy Erickson presented a thought-provoking lecture on “Reading Matthew 18 against John Howard Yoder, exploring the implications of Yoder’s actions for church discipline.” And I gave the October lecture examining Burke’s use of the term “political theologians,” possibly the first in English, and his

argument that politics and the pulpit should not mix. The Rev’d Canon Prof Scott Cowdell finished this year’s series with his lecture on “Trinity beyond revelation, salvation and sociality”, in which he critically engaged the systematic theology of Katherine Sonderegger.

Given the success of the series, with many scholars now asking for spots on the program, we will continue and further develop this important research initiative in 2024. The “Theological Disputes” lecture series has been a vital source of intellectual enrichment and scholarly engagement for the Centre and those connected to it. Whether attending in person or exploring the recorded lectures, individuals interested in theology, religion and stimulating intellectual discussions will find these lectures to be a valuable resource.



Dr Nikolai Blaskow, photo by Liz Jakimow



Theological Disputes, photo by Liz Jakimow



Evening soirée: ageing, spirituality and creativity - music

Sally Mordike

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

What does listening to music do for your spirit, your soul?

It's essential. Music is essential to me.

It's central to my being.

Music is the most important part of my life.

Participant with dementia, "Spiritual Reminiscence for People with Dementia" group

We've all experienced that moment of pure joy, awe or delight when listening to a particular piece of music. Sometimes this experience can be uplifting, and at others poignant, touching us in our very souls. The arts are just one way that spirituality is mediated for older people, and this process was acknowledged and celebrated on Thursday 16 November with an evening soirée hosted by the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies (CAPS).

Special guest for the evening was Judy Clingan AM, well-known Canberra composer. Judy started the evening with a fresh and beautiful composition of Psalm 71, "The Seniors Psalm", composed especially for this event. The evening included interesting and thought-provoking presentations from Rev Prof Elizabeth MacKinlay AM, Director of CAPS, who challenged us to think about our own spirituality and how music feeds our souls. Also included video excerpts from performances of "The Threshold", a production written by Judy about ageing.

With good food and wine, gentle conversation and wonderful music, connections were made among participants, and many expressed afterwards how much they had enjoyed the evening. Many left with light hearts, having had their souls nourished.

The CAPS Continuing Education Series will be starting up again in February 2024.

Save the date! *The CAPS National Conference is being planned for 23-24 September 2024, with pre-conference workshops on Sunday 22 September 2024. The theme for the conference is Spirituality and Ageing: Flourishing in community and care. More information in the new year.*



Musicians, photo by Sally Mordike



Sally Mordike, Judy Clingan, Elizabeth MacKinlay and Anne Harrington



Candles, photo by Sally Mordike



Bible Garden preparation for the months ahead

Sarah Stitt

Corporate Services and Events Officer, ACC&C

Over the past months of Spring the Bible Garden has been at its best. The lupins, irises, rock roses, rue, sage and moschate roses have bloomed. The pecan, pomegranate, apple and fig trees are fruiting. Sadly, there will be no apricots this year. Our gardener, Badri Rimal, has been working hard. Badri has planted more olive trees to continue the hedge up the steps to the Humanitarian Aid Workers' Memorial, which overlooks Lake Burley Griffin and out to the Tinderry Ranges. The original mature olive tree hedge has received a huge pruning, which allows easier access for harvesting. Two new juniper trees have been planted, and the Judas tree has been replaced. The watering system has been upgraded and 60 cubic metres of mulch has been spread in preparation for the forecasted hot summer ahead.

Gardeners will be aware of the challenges of maintaining a garden with a diverse range of plants. Some plants invade, some simply disappear, some like to walk – yes, they do! As Badri attempts to keep ahead of nature, he is also conscious of working with her. Nature needs to be respected. Most of Badri's challenges as he cares for our Bible Garden come solely from the natural environment – the eucalypts, the rabbits and possums, birds and self-sown plants, which we call weeds. Badri is working weekly to stay abreast of all these challenges. He loves the Bible Garden, bringing inspiration and motivation as he nurtures it. We continue to look forward to working with him over the next few years. Thank you Badri for your care.



The Bible Garden, photo by Liz Jakimow



Badri Rimal, Bible Garden gardener, photo by Sarah Stitt



The Bible Garden, photo by Liz Jakimow



Review of *Mimetic Theory and its Shadow Girard: Milbank, and Ontological Violence* (Michigan State University Press, 2023)

Professor Emeritus Wayne Hudson

ACC&C Adjunct Scholar

In this dramatically titled volume, the Australian Anglican theologian Scott Cowdell seeks to resolve a long-standing objection to the mimetic theory developed by the French theorist and literary critic René Girard: the objection that Girard's mimetic theory entails a fundamental ontological violence that is incompatible with the Christian doctrines of creation and providence. Girard's account of scapegoating violence, seen as providing the initial stability for our species to emerge and consolidate, is often taken to be incompatible with the Christian belief in a good creation. The distinguished British Anglican theologian John Milbank has long raised this concern about Girard's work. However, Girard's followers have been slow to answer Milbank's charges in any detail.

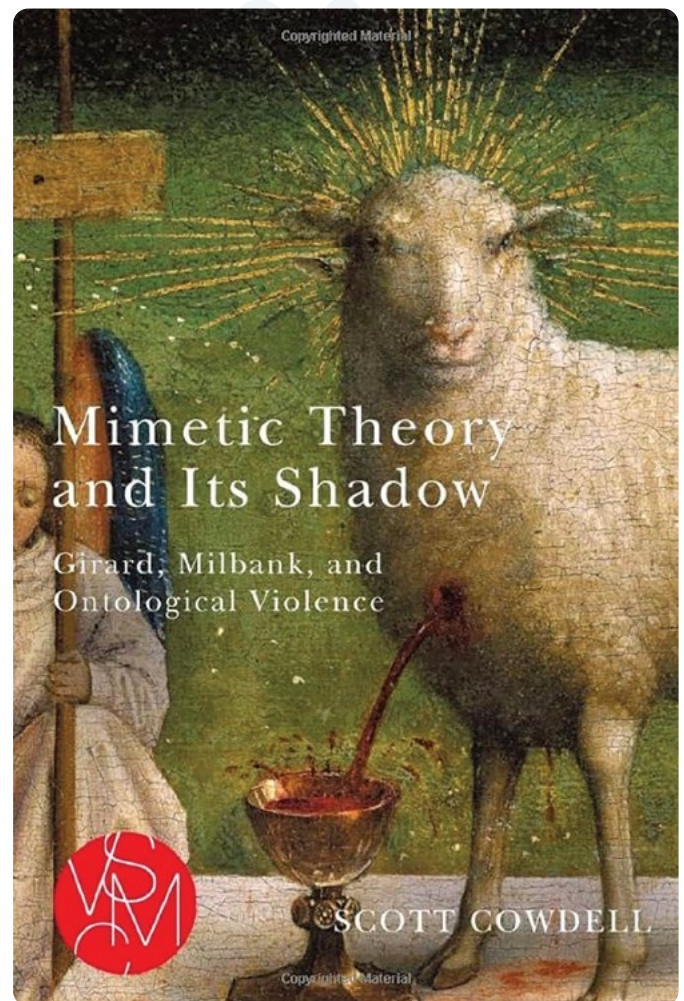
Cowdell addresses the issue in accessible prose of great quality. He attempts to show a way between the two apparently irreconcilable positions. With irenic spirit, but also analytic tenacity, he probes his way through Milbank's complex and often contestable arguments, explaining and evaluating them. At the same time, he expounds and further develops Girard's mimetic theory, showing how this theory may be enriched by a confrontation with Milbank. The tasks Cowdell has set himself are not easy to discharge, and Cowdell is to be congratulated on the clarity and skill with which he does justice to both these significant thinkers.

In attempting a reconciliation between their positions, Cowdell brings formidable learning to the analysis of their claims. He does not show that these claims can be established by independent argument or evidence, although he clearly thinks that a case to this effect can be made for Girard. Instead, Cowdell raises the discussion to another level with a mastery few other Australian theologians could equal. In the process he advocates a semiotic approach to Girard's mimetic theory and shows that ontological violence is an issue that Christians need to deal with explicitly and in realistic terms. In addition, he underlines the contemporary importance of the work of Duns Scotus and the Franciscan tradition, which Milbank tends to undervalue. Across a vast terrain Cowdell is unfailingly judicious and reliable.

Although Cowdell is clearly committed to Girard's approach rather than to Milbank's, he handles the claims of both perceptively and in a charitable spirit. Cowdell agrees with Milbank that divine participation is central to any Christian

world view, but also claims that Christians can learn a great deal from Girard's mimetic theory. In his view, however, Girard's vision of human transformation through Christ reveals a world beyond ontological violence, a consideration of which he claims Milbank fails to take adequate account. For Cowdell, ontological peace comes not at the beginning but at the end.

This book is an original contribution to contemporary theological scholarship. It is as adept as it is learned, and anyone interested in either Girard or Milbank will benefit greatly from reading it.



► Upcoming Events

**David Pereira's
'70 not out!' - No. 5**
1pm, The Chapel

10
DEC



Remembering Glenda
A celebration of life
All welcome
2pm, The Chapel

13
DEC



Pop-Up Choir concerts
The Chapel

15 & 17
DEC



CENTRE CLOSED

12.30pm 22 December 2023 –
9am 2 January 2024

**Opening night of 'A Journey
With Grief: exploring grief
through photography & poetry**

14
FEB

Opening night 6pm The Chapel, then
15-18 Feb & 22-25 Feb 10.30am-3.30pm



**ANSD Quiet Day
with Dr Heather Thomson**
Chambers Pavilion

17
FEB



**Theological Disputes
Bernard Doherty**
12.30 – 1.30
Chambers Pavilion

20
FEB



**Centre for an
Ethical Society Forum**
Speaker: Dr Jonathan Cole

21
FEB



The Threshold
Judith Clingan's music theatre
exploring ageing & end-of-life through
stories and music. 8pm, The Chapel

8
MAR



**Commonwealth Day
Celebration**
The Chapel

11
MAR



St Patrick's Day Service
The Chapel

16
MAR



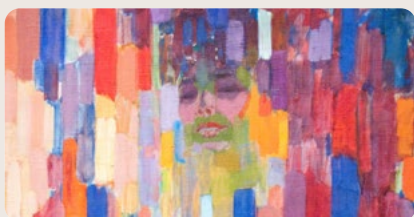
**The Ecumenical Way
of the Cross**
11am Good Friday
ACC&C

29
MAR



**Son et lumière: 12 Painters
and 12 Composers**
The Chapel

6
APR



CIMF
The Chapel

1-5
MAY



Eco v Ego
Exhibition
Anatoly Golobokov

8-18
MAY

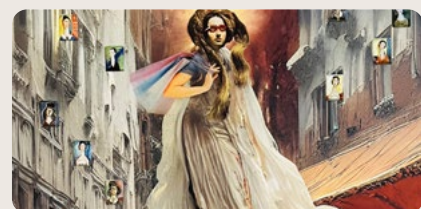




Photo by Liz Jakimow

Hire the Centre's facilities for your next event

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



THE CHAPEL



THE CHAMBERS PAVILION

What's been happening?

There are always so many events going on around the Centre, either being held at the wonderful facilities we have here or involving Centre staff. Some of the highlights from the past three months include the "Care for Creation" event held in partnership with Wellspring and featuring Ruth Harvey and Brooke Prentis, David Pereira's enchanting concert series "70 not out!" and the "Making Peas/ce Choral Remembrance Workshop" for school children. Take a look below to see some of the photos capturing these special moments at the Centre.

Theological Disputes



Dr Amy Erickson and Dr Jonathan Cole during the question-and-answer session after Dr Stevenson's lecture, photo by Liz Jakimow



Dr Jonathan Cole presenting his lecture, photo by Liz Jakimow

David Pereira's "70 not out!" concert series



"70 not out!" rehearsals, Edward Neenan on piano and David Pereira on cello, photo by Sarah Stitt

Care for Creation event



After being provided with a wonderful and informative tour of the Bible Gardens by Keith Skamp, the group paused for a photo. Pictures Left to Right: Nick Green, Fiona Green, Keith Skamp, Brooke Prentis and Ruth Harvey, photo by Liz Jakimow

Making Peace Choral Remembrance Workshop



During the Making Peace Choral Remembrance Workshop, students came together in commemoration of those who died for country and on country, photo by Liz Jakimow

Diwali Celebrations



Acting Executive Director of the ACC&C, Jonathan Cole, had the honour of attending the 2023 Diwali celebration at Government House on 27 October, at which the growing role and contribution of Australia's Hindu community was recognised and celebrated, photo by Madhav Thakkar

25th Anniversary Celebrations at the Governor-General's House



25th Anniversary Celebrations at Government House (from left to right) Dr Jonathan Cole, Ms Lin Hatfield Dodds, Governor-General David Hurley, Mrs Linda Hurley, Professor Renée Leon and Bishop Mark Short, photo by idphoto.com.au Irene Dowdy.

Multifaith leaders visit Parliament House



Director of Ecumenical Studies, Bishop Philip Huggins, along with the Rev Sharon Hollis, Dr Gawaine Powell-Davies, Rev Faaimata (Mata) Havea Hiliu and Mohamed Mohideen OAM met with Minister Chris Bowen to talk about the concern faith communities have about the climate crisis.

Prayer for the Centre

*God, powerful and gentle,
You love this southern land
And all its peoples, old and new.
As the cross shines in the heavens
So may Christ bring light to our nation,
As the waves encircle our shores
So may your mercy enfold us.*

*May the God who formed our southern land
Be for us a rock and strength.
May the God who rules our southern seas
Keep us safe from every storm.
May the God who made the southern skies turn
Our darkness into light.*

*As Canberra is a meeting place
Central to the Government of Australia,
So may this Centre be a true meeting place
Where all God's people may gather in a spirit of prayer,
A spirit of unity of minds and hearts; and
Where we may share in the very Communion of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Archbishop Francis Carroll



Photo by Liz Jakimow

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/>



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

