

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

ENGAGE

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'Neo-nature' and learning to
live in the Anthropocene

Clive Hamilton





Cross and fog, photo by Liz Jakimow Cover image: Rainbow at Araluen, photo by Liz Jakimow

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Acting Editor: Dr Jonathan Cole

Associate Editor: Liz Jakimow

Assistant Editor: Sarah Stitt

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



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD



Three pillars on foggy day with trees in foreground, photo by Liz Jakimow



Editorial

The ACC&C has had a long and productive association with Clive Hamilton, Professor of Public Ethics at Charles Sturt University and one of Australia's leading public intellectuals. Clive is the founder of The Australia Institute and author of influential books on climate change and China. He is a long-time resident of George Browning House and has been a generous and willing collaborator of the Centre for many years now. From 2017 to 2020, the Centre held a series of seminars engaging Clive's work on climate change, attended by Clive. These seminars culminated in the publication of *Theology on a Defiant Earth: Seeking Hope in the Anthropocene* in 2022, containing essays by theologians and biblical scholars exploring the implications of Clive's work on climate change for theology. Clive graciously wrote the introductory essay and a response to the engagement with his work.

There is an important social justice concern at the heart of this argument given the asymmetrical impact climate change will impose on the poor and the vulnerable, lacking, as they do, the resources to adapt to the new reality as effectively as those who possess greater means.

Clive's latest book, *Living Hot: Surviving and Thriving on a Heating Planet* (co-authored with George Wilkendorf), argues that Australia can now do little to affect the overall trajectory of climate change and, as a consequence, and as a matter of urgency, must now prioritise adaptation over mitigation in order to prepare coming generations to live in a more dangerous and inhospitable climate. There is an important social justice concern at the heart of this argument given the asymmetrical impact climate change will impose on the poor and the vulnerable, lacking, as they do, the resources to adapt to the new reality as effectively as those who possess greater means. The publication of this latest book by the man whose memoirs are aptly titled *Provocateur* (in which he mentioned his positive relationship with the ACC&C) provided the Centre with an opportunity to host a public conversation with Clive exploring the arguments of *Living Hot*, held in the chapel on 23 July.

It is only fitting in light of the Centre's long, fruitful collaboration with Clive that we make the environment the feature of this issue of *Engage*, not just as a token of our thanks and appreciation for the contribution Clive has made to both the Centre and Australian public life, but as a mark of the Centre's enduring commitment to embody, model and communicate wisdom for the common good in relation to the major ethical and social challenges of our time.

The issue contains several theological reflections on climate change and the environment, along with a report of the Centre's public conversation with Clive and a book review of *Living Hot*. There is also reporting on other Centre activities, including several important events in the First Nations Space. On 18 June, the Centre brought Indigenous theologian, Prof Anne Pattel-Gray of the University of Divinity, to Canberra, where she gave a seminar on the future of Indigenous theology to Centre scholars and spoke at a Christians for an Ethical Society forum on reconciliation after the Voice referendum. On 10 July, Stan Grant gave the inaugural Yindymarra Fireside Oration at the Centre's Meeting Place under the stars of a glorious Canberra Winter's night, followed by a reception in the Chambers' Pavilion. It is so pleasing to see the Centre's Barton site, located on a very special piece of land in the heart of our nation's capital, continue to be used for important meetings, events and initiatives that make significant and positive contributions to the life of our nation.

Dr Jonathan Cole

Interim Executive Director, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture



'Neo-nature' and learning to live in the Anthropocene

Clive Hamilton

Professor of Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University

Do you, like me, hesitate when you refer to floods or bushfires as *natural* disasters?

When Earth's atmosphere is warmer and moister because of human-induced climate change, all weather events have a human fingerprint. The now well-developed field of "attribution studies" calculates the role climate change plays in making particular extreme events more likely and more intense.

We have always drawn a neat distinction between what is natural and what is artificial or human-made. (Insurance policies refer to the former as "acts of God.") To be sure, city parks have always been a hybrid; but they are a hybrid of the artificial and the wild or untouched "out there." But what if there is no longer a wild and untouched out there?

If every cubic metre of Earth's atmosphere, oceans, rivers and soils now has a human imprint, it no longer makes sense to refer to the "natural environment" or the "natural world", does it? I have been in remote places that appear for all the world to be untouched by human hand, until the biologist or landscape ecologist with me points out the human impacts visible to the trained eye.

Having said that, it would make no sense to refer to an old growth forest or a coral reef as "artificial" or "unnatural" simply because human activity has brought some change to them; they retain their fundamental naturalness.

So the terminology developed in a world of relative stasis, and in which change was caused by natural processes, is failing us. On the new Earth, what do the words "native", "natural", "alien", "endemic" and "exotic" mean anymore? If a native species migrates from its traditional range to a new one made more suitable by climate change, is it now an exotic species? If humans translocate an animal (or a coral or a plant) to a range where it is better adapted to the emerging conditions, does it remain in its "natural habitat" or is it "introduced"?

Ecologists now study "novel ecosystems" created when species move towards cooler areas and do so at varying speeds so that new assemblages of species must learn how to adapt and live together, or not. These novel ecosystems have different dynamics including new predator-prey relationships.

In my new book, *Living Hot*, written with George Wilkenfeld, I coined the term "neo-nature" as a way of preserving the common-sense idea of nature while accepting that the

environment is no longer natural in the sense of being unaltered by humans. (I say "coined" although I see the word is used, in a different sense, by the design profession.) Others have proposed adopting the term "neo-native" for species that have been translocated to new ranges to help them cope with a changing climate, so 'neo-nature' is a generalisation of the idea and reflects the fact that humans have created a different kind of Earth, an Anthropocene Earth.

The Earth will change a great deal more in the coming decades. We cannot preserve nature the way it was, even those parts that still seem largely untouched by humans. We need to change our attitudes as well as the language we use.

All of this is hard to accept. The loss of the natural, as a moral benchmark dividing the good from the bad, is sad and disorienting. Yet the sooner we accommodate ourselves to regarding and managing landscapes and ecosystems for the changing conditions the better. Preserving an ecosystem may entail helping it to change, helping it to adapt to the new climatic regime we are imposing on it. Managing "neo-nature" asks us to enter into a new way of thinking.

All of this is only one element of what Australians must do, sooner or later, to prepare for and protect ourselves from the impacts of a heating planet on our lives. It seems as though we have only in recent years grasped the imperative of becoming serious about reducing our emissions. Yet now, in *Living Hot*, we are asking Australians to accept the fact that whatever we do in Australia can make no perceptible difference to the climate our children and grandchildren will have to learn to live through in coming decades.

While we should cut our emissions quickly for moral reasons, and because doing so will be better for the economy, the sooner we shift attention and resources to protecting ourselves from floods, fires, storms, sea-level rise and heatwaves the more suffering will be avoided.

At the moment, we are doing very little to prepare, even though we know more extreme weather events are now unavoidable. Australia spends 97 per cent of disaster funding on clean-up and recovery and only three per cent on measures to prevent the damage in the first place (according to the Productivity Commission).

We cannot preserve nature the way it was, even those parts that still seem largely untouched by humans.



Trees in flood, photo by Liz Jakimow

Making the nation resilient means transforming everything—from where we live and the dwellings we live in, to city planning, transport infrastructure, water management, farming, coastal management and biodiversity conservation, to mention the more obvious elements.

If we do not prepare *together* for life in an increasingly stressful climate, we know what will happen. The rich will spend up on their own protection while the poor and vulnerable will be left to fend for themselves. Making ourselves ready for what we know is coming, and doing so in cooperative ways, is not only common sense but an insurance policy for social justice in times of growing danger.

Globally, we in Australia are in the best position to endure the new conditions we will have to cope with in the decades to come. And we can begin now; we don't have to wait for any kind of technological breakthrough. We have the opportunity to make a nation in which the next generations can survive and perhaps even live well on the different kind of Earth that is our future.



Native grasslands, photo by Liz Jakimow



Sacred space, sacred time, and our ecological mission

Mick Pope

Professor of Environmental Mission, Missional University

The problem with the term environment is that it can introduce a binary into our thinking – meaning the place where the nonhuman lives. Language around the “built environment” goes further, but not far enough. Ecology, the study of natural systems is more useful, and Pope Francis embraces the use of the term “human ecology” in *Laudato Si*.

A theological lens recognises the close connection between human existence and the rest of creation more robustly, noting that both ecology and economy share the prefix *eco-*, taken from the Greek *oikos*, meaning household.

The discipline of ecotheology is not an attempt to “green theology” but to reflect the integrated nature of reality. The bible is not simply read *for* ecological ethics but is read *through* the lens that all creation is the *oikos* of God.

This view is supported by the Priestly creation story of Gen 1:1–2:3, which describes creation as a temple. The obvious clue to this is the placement of the divine image into creation on day six, together with a shared vocabulary of completion between creation (Gen 1:31–2:2) and the Tabernacle (Ex 39:32–33; 40:33). Understanding the context of the Babylonian captivity brings this theme out further. In the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, the gods ask the storm God Marduk to slay Tiamat. The reward for this murder is that the rest of the gods will build Marduk a temple and elevate him to the head of the pantheon.

The parallels between the Priestly Genesis and *Enuma Elish* illustrate a common *Chaoskampf* or struggle against the forces of chaos. Rather than the femicide of the personification of salt water by Marduk and dividing her corpse into heaven and earth, Elohim (God) divides the watery deep (*tehom*) into waters above and below. The sea monsters on day four are creations of Elohim, and not the children of Tiamat. Both Elohim and Marduk hang up their bows after the battle, in the former’s case after the Flood.

All of this points to creation as a temple in macrocosm, as Jewish scholar Jon Levenson puts it, while the Jerusalem temple is creation in microcosm. Moreover, there’s a direct connection between agriculture and worship – a theology of land care that precedes our modern theologies of creation care. A few short observations illustrate this.

First, what was the formless void (Gen 1:2)? The Hebrew phrase *tohu wabohu* is used in Isa 34 to describe the agricultural collapse that follows war. Edom was going to be judged for what it had done to Israel, and the result of this judgement would be that its land would be full of wild animals, thorns and thistles – all signs of agricultural collapse. Note that English translations often don’t get this right.

Second, in the extended discussion on seedbearing plants on day three of creation, practical theologian Ellen Davis sees an awkwardness and departure from the conciseness of the first two

days. This points towards the particularity of place and the genetic diversity of the region at the time – the Levant being one of the locations where agriculture originated. Further, day six includes the giving of green plants for the other-than-human creatures – divine provision is for all creatures.

In this context, the subduing of the Earth (v. 28) is best understood as agriculture and the particular struggles of the rain watered highlands of Israel. Hence, the creation story is a liturgy that celebrates the divine provision of our material needs, which considers the particularity of place.

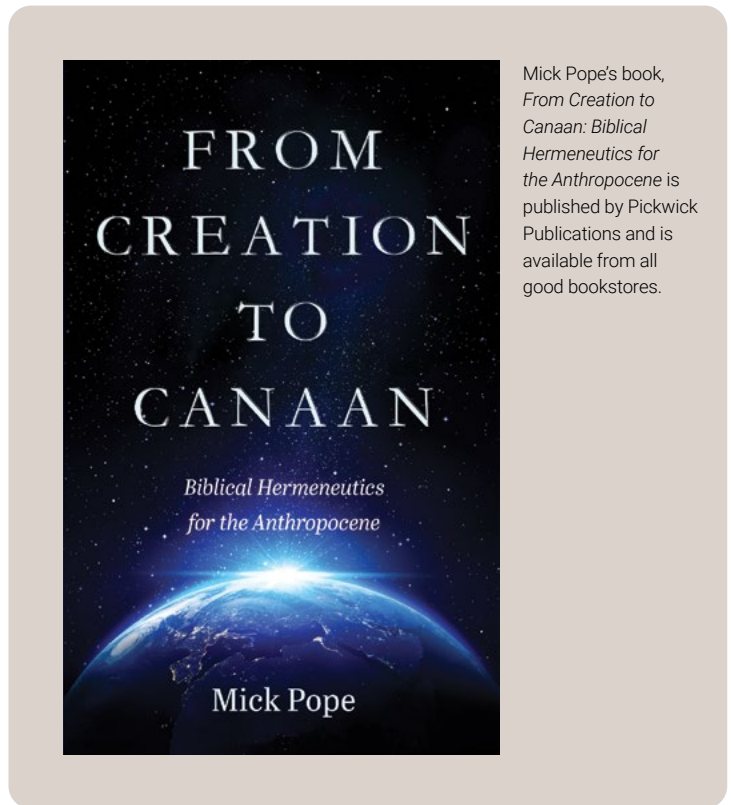
Third, there is a strong connection between agriculture and religious life. In Gen 1:14 the lights in the sky are for signs and for seasons (*moadim*), but these seasons are not the four that we mark. Rather, Lev 23:1 lists the appointed festivals of the Lord (*moadi YHWH*): seven festivals with harvests in spring or autumn celebrating events in “salvation history.” For example, the festival of booths was associated with the fruit harvest. Old Testament scholar Michael LeFebvre comments that “The festivals provided a blend of practical, agricultural structure as well as theological inspiration to govern their stewardship of the land before God.”

Tied closely to the tending of sacred space through agriculture is the marking of sacred time, which is Sabbath. Sabbath is central to understanding the creation story, with day, good, God, earth all used in multiples of seven. Levenson says that creation is completed, consummated, and mimetically re-enacted in the Sabbath. Hence Sabbath keeping is one way that order is maintained against the forces of chaos experienced as a lack of agricultural blessing. The land needs rest from our ceaseless striving, and to practice Sabbath and Jubilee (Lev 25) is to maintain good order against chaos.

Hence, the creation story is a liturgy that celebrates the divine provision of our material needs, which considers the particularity of place.

So how do these ideas help us in modern Australia in the face of a changing climate? The first is to understand that the fundamental way in which we relate to the world is via food – even more important for suburbanites. We need to acknowledge the divinely provided cornucopia and give thanks for it. Further, our practices must be sustainable, and hence some concept of ceasing from labouring with land to allow it to rest and recover is essential. Combatting climate change means protecting our plates.

Second, for the Israelite, holiness was expressed in Sabbath keeping (Lev 19:2–3; 26:2), which explicitly included the land as an active partner (Lev 26:34–25). If only the church could see land care, if not creation care, as an expression of Christian holiness. Third, given the specificity of the creation account to the Levant, Sabbath principle as chaos defeating ceremony always needs to be contextualised. Colonialism has been all too effective at imposing foreign order and hence bringing disorder onto colonised lands. Ecotheology on country must not be deaf and blind to injustice, dispossession, and age-old wisdom, lest it repeat the sins of the past.



Blossoms reaching for sky, photo by Liz Jakimow



Environmental spirituality

David Tacey

Adjunct Research Professor, ACC&C

When alienation from nature becomes the norm, it takes a great deal to convince people that we need to reconsider our relationship with nature. But the ecological emergency serves as a wake-up call about the dangers of our alienation. When we stray far from nature, there is what popular culture calls a “disturbance in the force”, and a breakdown of the order of things becomes a possibility. We have become all too familiar with the components of this breakdown: pollution, depletion of the ozone layer, loss of biodiversity, climate change and a rapid increase in extreme weather events. Weather events that have been described as “once in a hundred years” episodes now seem to happen every other year. Things are not right, and many of us feel threatened and in danger.

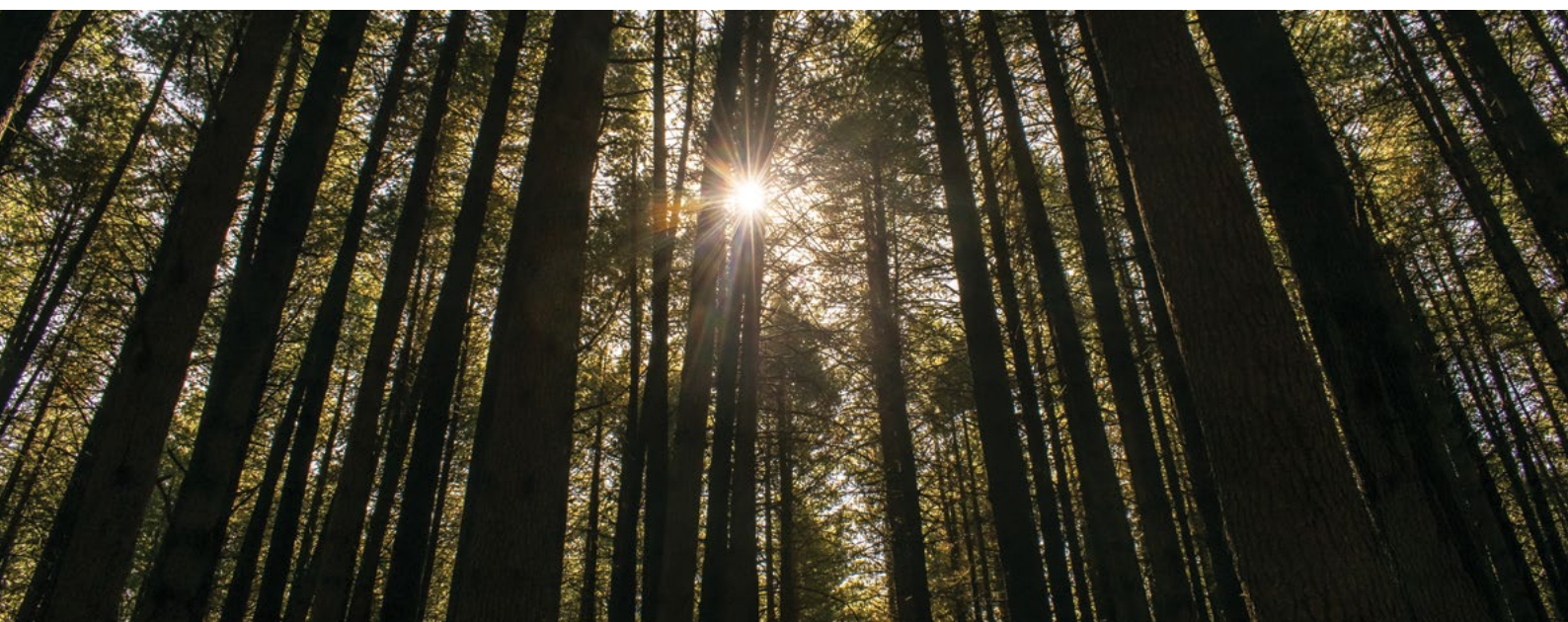
Even people without romantic attachment to nature are saying: “Gaia is angry.” James Lovelock’s hypothesis, that earth is a unified bio-physical system and we have disturbed its self-regulation, seems to have hit a nerve in popular consciousness.¹ There are things going on in the natural world that are unprecedented, and part of our response to the

disorder is to think of nature as a unified whole, and resort to phrases like the “anger of Gaia” to account for it. This strikes me as a good thing that arises from the crisis: we are forced to think in holistic terms about nature and this means the crisis is reawakening the ancient mythological bond with the world. This bond had been lost for ages, and although it is too early to talk about a spiritual reconnection with nature, the ecological emergency will likely jolt us in this direction.

In ancient times there was world-animation, and every indigenous culture that has survived the onslaught of colonisation bears testimony to some kind of enchantment. Then, with modernisation and secularisation, we entered a world where there was no animation of the world, and now we are entering a post-secular phase where the possibility of the invisible is returning. But how are we to imagine this return? How are we to conceptualise world-animation in the future? Clearly, in order to move forward we have to go back, to recover lost visions that can inspire our future.

1. James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

*The environmental crisis is the result of our inability to love fully and without reservation.
It is our failure to love the world as part of our selves and as God’s creation.*



Sugar Pine Walk, photo by Liz Jakimow

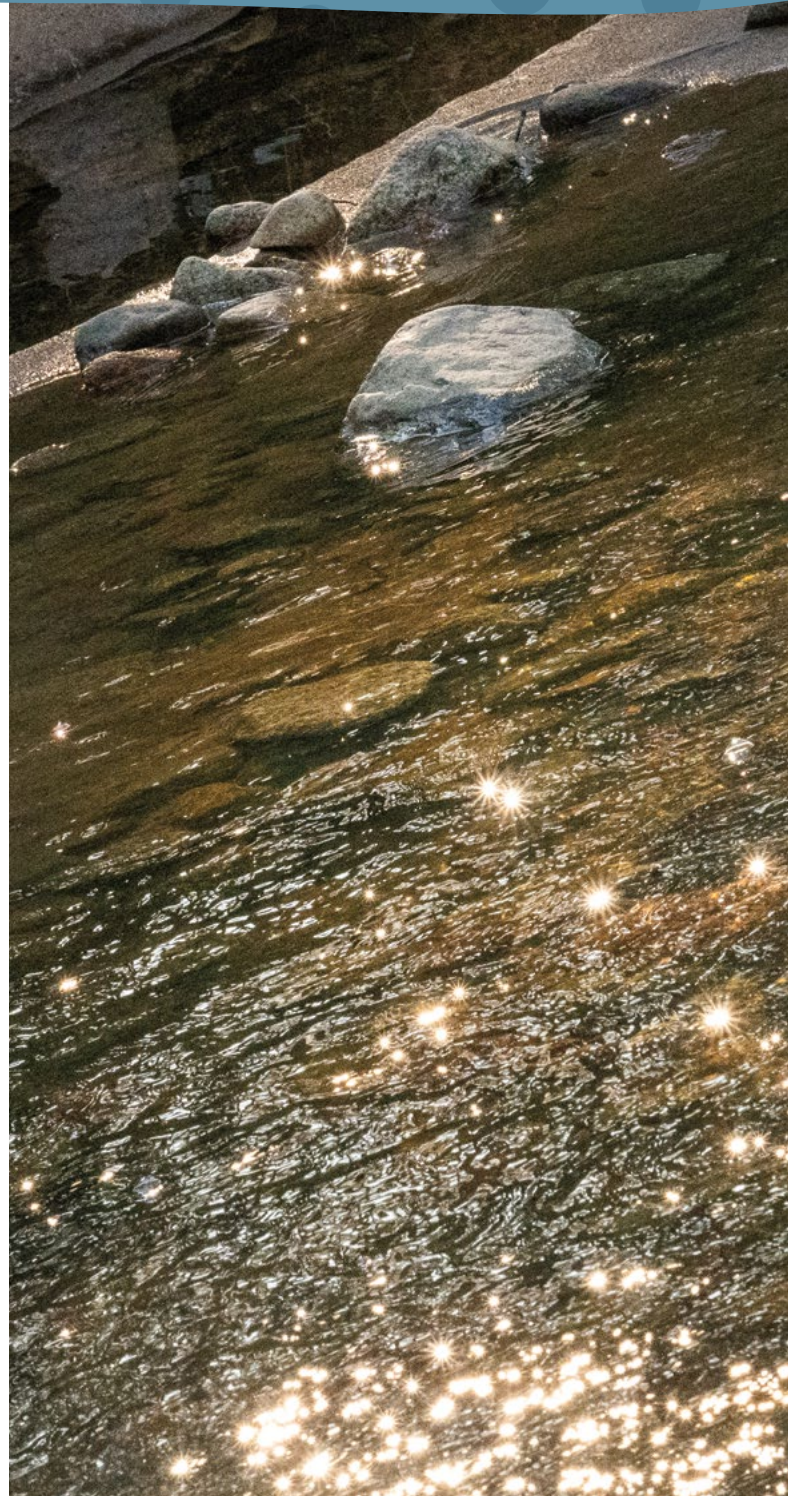
Meanwhile, as Annie Dillard puts it:

It is difficult to undo our own damage, and to recall to our presence that which we have asked to leave. It is hard to desecrate a sacred grove and change your mind.... We doused the burning bush and cannot rekindle it; we are lighting matches in vain under every green tree. Did the wind once cry, and the hills shout forth praise? Now speech has perished from among the lifeless things of earth, and living things say very little to very few.²

It is easier to lose world-animation than to win it back. Destroying visions of a unified world was quickly achieved by science, but now we have to go back to the past and find out what those ancient visions were pointing to. Once we refused their assertions and scorned their claims, but now we must adopt a more respectful attitude and use our best resources to "recall to our presence that which we have asked to leave."

If we go back in time, we find religions, myths and cosmologies that claim that the world hangs by a gossamer thread, and if the thread is broken, disaster strikes. The thread has different names in different cultures: spirit or soul in the West, the Tao and the One in China, Indra's net in India, and, in Aboriginal cultures, the Dreaming. The diverse names and cultures ought not blind us to the similarities. If the thread is not attended to and nourished by cultural practices, sacrifices, rituals and prayers the world falls apart. The idea that runs through much of the world's visionary literature is that there is a subtle reality, call it a "dream thread", that maintains the integrity of the universe and the unity of creation. Our responsibility as human beings is to recognise this subtle reality, or invisible order, identify it, serve it and by doing so the whole of creation is sustained.

The poet Walt Whitman wrote that the soul is an unseen force that binds the world. He said it is like a "noiseless patient spider" which "launches filament, filament, filament out of itself." It throws out its web into "measureless oceans of space", "seeking the spheres to connect them." Its one hope is that its "gossamer thread" will "catch somewhere" and its threads "hold", forming a "bridge" across the spheres. When I first read Whitman's poem, "A noiseless, patient spider",³ I was reminded of the Aboriginal Dreaming, which throws out a web of mystical threads into geographical and cosmic space, binding humanity to nature and nature to humanity.⁴



Lights shimmering on Araluen Creek, photo by Liz Jakimow

2. Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (London: Picador, 1984), 70.

3. Walt Whitman, 'A noiseless, patient spider' (1868), in Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, fifth edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 1085.

4. The best indigenous exploration of the Aboriginal Dreaming is Vicki Grieves, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy: The Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*. Discussion Paper No. 9. (Darwin: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009). This work by an Aboriginal writer can be downloaded at: <http://www.crcah.org.au/publications/downloads/DP9-Aboriginal-Spirituality.pdf>



Gum leaf caught in tree, photo by Liz Jakimow

Then I thought about Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Romantic poets, and how they were creating not only a new poetry but a new mythology about our bond with nature. Art seems to have taken over the spiritual responsibility that was previously the arena of religious cosmologies. In our society, art is one of the remaining carriers of the sacred, and that is why art is more important today than ever before, because it carries the spiritual vision in a disbelieving age.

The subtle threads that bind us to nature have always interested me, not only now, as we struggle to find ways to reconnect with nature in an ecological crisis. Even as a boy I sensed that the depth connection to nature is a religious or spiritual problem, not something that governments could fix by moral decrees or environmental laws. While the laws and decrees are necessary in a reckless age, there is something more fundamental that is rarely talked about.

The environmental crisis is the result of our inability to love fully and without reservation. It is our failure to love the world as part of our selves and as God's creation. Once we recover our ability to love fully and unconditionally there is no longer any need to be told by authorities to care more about the environment. Such external voices are no longer necessary because there is no longer any impulse to mistreat the world or behave thoughtlessly toward it. This might seem simple, but it has always been my basic thought about the environmental problem. Ultimately we have misnamed it as an environmental crisis, because it is rather a crisis of human consciousness; it is our fault, not the fault of the environment.

Something like love or fellow-feeling is absent from our relations with the world. We have confined our love to human persons dear to us, family, friends, partners and children. Or we confine love to our ideas, religions, ideologies, and systems of meaning. Our love seems to dwindle and finally stop or disappear when we reach beyond the human to the world. Einstein put the challenge this way:

A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.⁵

We need, he says, to widen our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Some people refer to our problem as "anthropocentrism", being bound to or caught up in the human. Psychologists might refer to it as egotism or narcissism, that is, a failure to live beyond the ego, and beyond that which the ego sees as related to its own interests or edification. But the world can't be bracketed out in this way. The cut between self and world is entirely illusory.

If we humans care only about ourselves, then the notion of what constitutes *self* has to be broadened to take in the world. If our love can be expanded to include the cosmos, there can be real change. We draw the circles of our belonging too narrowly, and live in tight and ever-narrowing circles of compassion. We have to learn to fall in love with the world. We have to care for the world as if it were ourselves. Alice Walker put it well: *Anything We Love, Can Be Saved*.⁶ This is a source of hope amid the gloom about the state of the world. If our love can be expanded, the rest looks after itself.

5. Albert Einstein, cited in Walter Sullivan, 'The Einstein Papers: A Man of Many Parts', New York Times Archives (March 29, 1972); <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/03/29/archives/the-einstein-papers-a-man-of-many-parts-the-einstein-papers-man-of.html>

6. Alice Walker, *Anything We Love, Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (London: Women's Press, 1997).



Climate as Catalyst

Jione Havea

Adjunct scholar, Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society (CRES)

Climate change could be slowed down to allow attempts to mediate (the crises) and mend (the life contexts), to catch up. But two (proverbial) elephants—development and economics—are rumbling across the land, the sea, and the sky, and they are relentless. Development is financially, ecologically, and culturally costly; and economics thrives by overcoming financial costs and by building up capitals. At the underside of the interloping of these two elephants are trampled ecologies and deformed cultures.

Because the ecosystem is alive, and growing, climate/ecological changes are inevitable. Changes are part of life.

The main problems in our days and in our contexts are, first, that many of the ecological changes are “un-natural” and irreversible, and second, some members of the human-species deny responsibility for the destructive ecological changes. We can of course debate until the crows and the cows come home, but the bottom line is that climate change is taken to be a problem that needs to be reversed and resolved.

The debates around climate change have called attention to the damages and burdens that climate change brings upon the ecology, and the injustices and traumas that follow. Climate change is a big problem, and the heavy lifting falls upon the shoulders of poor and impoverished folk who contribute the least to the damaging and destruction of the ecosystem.

What if climate change is taken to be a catalyst? How might a change of attitude transform the way we understand and embrace climate change? To invite *talanoa* (story-telling, conversation) around these questions, I offer two assertions – based on the native Tongan lunar calendar – relating to the life-world of Pasifika natives.

First, the life-world of Pasifika natives has *space for disasters*. I make this assertion based on the Tongan lunar calendar. There are thirteen months in our calendar, and the names of three of the months—three moon-cycles from October 15ish to December 27ish—anticipate struggles with the harshness of the ecosystem.

The September moon-cycle is when planting of the second season of yams takes place, and this will empty out the storehouses of families and villages. After the planting, there will not be a lot of food left for the next several months. The three moon-cycles that follow are hotter-summery months, and their names warn Tongan natives to expect hardship and struggles: *Fufū-ki-nekinanga* (October moon-cycle) refers to a sunny, dry, and deathly time of the year; *’Uluenga* (November moon-cycle) refers to a time when the *’ulu*/head of the

land (that is, the leaves) is *enga*/yellow; *’O’oa-mo-fāngongo* (December moon-cycle) warns Tongans that the sea will also be ‘sunny’ (hostile, antagonist). Our spring season begins with the January moon-cycle, and the rains come with the February-March moon-cycle.

Every year, three moon-cycles orient Tongans to hardships and struggles with ecological strains. Native Tongans are thus conditioned to prepare toward facing and surviving ecological hardship. In this connection, the problem becomes a catalyst. And in my humble opinion, we could take the same approach toward climate change. If our life-world is oriented toward hardship, and toward learning to survive those, instead of being oriented to prosperity – in the names of development and economics, then it would be easier for us to embrace climate as catalyst.

Second, in the Pasifika life-world, we know that *reality often differs from expectations*. In the Tongan calendar, for example, the three moon-cycles from mid-February to early-May are the rainy months when the yams grow the strongest. These are the spring months, and we expect the land to be green. That expectation is evident in the names of the three moon-cycles (February-March: *Vai-Mu’a*/early waters; March-April: *Vai-Mui*/later waters; April-May: *Faka’afu-Mo’ui*/lively growth). But reality is sometimes different, because these three months are also our hurricane season. The springing of life is disrupted. There is growth, and there is also damage. The Pasifika life-world provides reality-checks upon our expectations.

So what? I offer the observations and assertions above to invite *talanoa*, and rethinking, of how we engage with climate change. We who live on the cluster of islands now known as Australia do not live in the Pasifika life-world, nor according to the Tongan lunar calendar, but there is space for considering if and how climate change could be a catalyst.



Yams (Pila Tangi), photo by Jione Havea



An Aboriginal theological perspective on peace

Anne Pattel-Gray

Head of School of Indigenous Studies, University of Divinity

Peace is an aspect of life that all humanity strives to experience at least once in their lifetime. When we think of the peace offered to us by God, we think of a world that is just, harmonious and life giving. However, one has to wonder if this peace is achievable in a world full of greed, hunger for power, wealth, and privilege. Is the peace of God unobtainable in this world or is it more spiritual than experiential?

The official colonial history of Australia omits the truth of colonial invasion, massacres and the frontier wars between First Nations peoples and the colonial invaders. The theft of lands and economic wealth is not documented in Australia's official recording of history. The enslavement of men, women and children, the rape of women and children and the forced removal from traditional lands are not recorded and the majority of Australian citizens are ignorant of this history.

Australia's First Nations peoples have many obstacles and hurdles to overcome and dismantle that keeps peace out of our reach. Such as the continuing colonial oppression, injustices, racist violence, the destruction of First Nations societal systems and family structures, the high incarceration of our youth and the intergenerational confinement to a life of poverty, before they can dream of ever obtaining peace.

The lived experience of First Nations people is one of trauma and the struggle to survive within a Commonwealth nation that has little compassion or affection for its First Nations people. Yet, First Nations people possess a deep spiritual faith that enables them to extend the hand of grace to their oppressors in the hope of finding justice, acceptance, reparations and peace. Aboriginal people live by the Law of the Creator Spirit which recognises the role of the Ancestors and the obligations and responsibilities we must fulfil. Aboriginal spirituality and faith explain who we are, it is the core of our being and the life source of our soul.

Australia's First Nations peoples have many obstacles and hurdles to overcome and dismantle that keeps peace out of our reach.

Australia's First Nations peoples' spiritual life is one that is relational and connected to the Creator Spirit, Spirit in Country, and creation. Peace has always been understood as being on Country, where we are one with the Creator Spirit, guided by the wisdom

teacher on Country and being Spirit-led and one with the whole creation. Here Aboriginal people feel the nurturing presence of what it means to experience God's peace that passes all understanding. This peace provides us spiritual strength to endure the racial violence, hatred, and exclusion we face and combat every day in Australia by the white sociopolitical structures and systems placed to control us.

Besides drawing on the spiritual strength of Country the other factor that sustains Aboriginal people are biblical scriptures



Gathering place, photo by Liz Jakimow



Native grasslands, photo by Liz Jakimow

on which we trust to give meaning and hope to First Nations people's lives, such as when Paul speaks of a peace that passes all understanding in Philippians 4:5-7.

"The Lord is Near! **6** Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation with prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. **7** And the peace that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (NIV)

Paul provides a perfect example of his faith and steadfastness to the Lord during the most difficult time of his life. In Paul's letter to the Philippians about the peace that surpasses all understanding, he was suffering with great physical pain and yet he speaks of giving thanks while in prison and about Christ guarding his heart and mind during this time of loneliness and isolation. Paul's faith and steadfastness saw him in daily prayer with the Lord.

If this is to be understood that we are to reach out to God for wisdom and guidance, one must wonder why there are so many religious wars and conflicts happening in the world.

The First Nations people who are incarcerated or in prison physically, emotionally and in all other ways seek these words of inspiration as they help them to look for hope in the most hopeless situations. Through their faith they overcome their feelings of anxiety and walk with confidence with this biblical scripture burnt into their minds and hearts.

Today, in a world that has faced a pandemic and struggle with economic uncertainty, horrific headlines of wars and thousands being killed, we are consumed with anxiety and economic

stress to survive. Many Australian families face a world that has been turned upside down and what was once secure ground has now turned into quicksand.

The sad reality is that people search to find peace in all kinds of places, but this cannot be found just anywhere but with God, because God's peace transcends any peace that can be offered by humanity. Worldly peace is fleeting, and it is dependent upon many factors such as the social environment and is reliant on both political and economic circumstances. Where God's peace provides lasting resolutions, it is salvation through Jesus and Christ's presence in our life.

There are three kinds of peace:

1. There is a *spiritual* peace with God the Creator
2. A *relational* peace with each other and with the whole of creation
3. An *emotional* peace that is found within ourselves.

In the gospel we learn that Jesus Christ provides us with an inner peace that surpasses the peace offered by the world. Following in the footsteps of Jesus requires us to stand on the side of the oppressed, the poor and downtrodden. We are to embrace the Spirit of truth and testify of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for the world to give us eternal life, hope, justice, and peace.

As Jesus states in John 14:27, "**27** Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." (NIV)

Australia's First Nations people understand this verse as this is reinforced to us every time we are on country.



The inaugural Yindyamarra Fireside Oration with Stan Grant

Jack Jacobs

Research Fellow, Yindyamarra, Charles Sturt University

“What man needs is silence and warmth, what he is given is an icy pandemonium.” Prof Stan Grant invoked the French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil’s wise words from her essay, “Human personality”, at the Inaugural Yindyamarra Fireside Oration held out in the Winter cold, close by the fire, beneath the ghost gum and the Great Cross.

The Oration will occur on an annual basis and call speakers, both Australian and international, to reflect on what Simone Weil’s words mean to them.

Stan Grant used the first Oration to provide an invitation to Australians to join him in the journey towards a better democracy, rooted in a deeper national imagining and dreaming. Stan spoke of the need to summon a spirit in Australia’s self, capable of withstanding the violence and ailments of modern society, with its media intent on division. Instead, Grant called for unity across lines of difference. For Australians to discover where they are, in solidarity with one another, to reject the other question of who they are.

The Yindyamarra Trust is an opening, a call, a generous offering to Australians to draw on Wiradjuri and other wisdoms interpreted and stewarded by Stan Grant and his family towards a rejuvenated Australian democracy that draws us into deeper questions of Australian identity, of how we make a gentler nation. A nation of spirit, heart, and ultimately love.

The community present at the Yindyamarra Oration had their felt response to Prof Grant’s speech echoed in Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), CSU, Prof Mark Evans’ pledge to earn the gift of the Yindyamarra Trust.

The Yindyamarra Trust will be an emerging platform for leading conversation, debate, research, and reflection on the future of Australian democracy and national identity.



Stan Grant at the Inaugural Yindyamarra Fireside Oration, photo by David Beach



Stan Grant at the Inaugural Yindyamarra Fireside Oration, photo by David Beach



Could artificial intelligence help to slow climate change?

Robbie Tulip

Board member, Christians for an Ethical Society (CES)

The scale and pace of the AI revolution are daunting, even frightening, as we grapple with the possible emergence of a form of super intelligence. And yet AI also holds exciting potential to bring wisdom for the common good into political, social and ethical concerns. Dr Jonathan Cole, Interim Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, explored these themes in an address to Christians for an Ethical Society at the ACC&C on 23 April 2024 on “The AI revolution – benefits, harms and the fate of human existence.”

ChatGPT, face detection, text editors, search algorithms, iPhones, recommendation systems, chatbots for customer service, digital assistants, smart home devices and self-drive vehicles. All these and more are revolutionising industry and society. The large language model of ChatGPT enables dialogue that can feel like talking to a super-intelligent person. Prompt engineering, the ability to ask ChatGPT the right questions, is unlocking undreamt-of utility, flexibility, breadth of knowledge and speed.

Ethical control of this technology can add value for real human needs. Wide participation is essential. AI is led by private investment in the trillions of dollars, with governments way behind. Jonathan noted that the ethical frame for this new tool is not intrinsically moral. Only human agency brings morality.

Harms are not obvious. These powerful tools are changing how we interact, most obviously with smart phones. Software developers are not able to make best judgements on trade-offs and ethical dilemmas. Society has many different views, with no consensus. We need to work out who decides, through democratic constraint on the power of corporations and governments.

Self-driving cars using AI can't speed, get drunk, fall asleep or get distracted. AI can read MRI scans and provide basic legal advice. Highly skilled jobs are endangered. Like the shift from horses to cars, we are seeing the creative destruction of previous large industries.

The AI technotopia is faster and more consequential than the industrial revolution. The large language model of ChatGPT shocked industry in its scale and breadth, widely compared to the emergence of a new species. Our economic, political and cultural systems face systemic transformation. We need to ask how AI could help us to retain our humanity, consciously, purposefully and with discipline.

Churches could find a new role in the AI future, in the practice of embodied gathering. Theology will be transformed by the remarkable new access to information, supporting new opportunities for spiritual life of meaning and engagement. AI will become a necessary part of intellectual life.

Deep fakes could swing an election or start a war. Digital tyranny in China shows the dangers. The Terminator movies imagined a superintelligence attempting to dominate humanity. And yet AI will bring entirely new levels of evidence into policy processes.

My own interest in AI is primarily in climate policy. Global warming is much more dangerous than most people realise, far beyond the capacity of net zero emissions to fix. Public debates will use machine learning to assess different scenarios, as new planetary cooling technologies become essential to prevent the collapse of Earth Systems.

On the alternatives that Jonathan Cole posed between fear and excitement as responses to artificial intelligence, I come down much more on the side of excitement. AI is a tool to present integrated information, enabling better decisions that can enable a path toward a more peaceful, prosperous, sustainable, biodiverse and equitable world. The roadblocks in the way of those high goals are immense. We need to explore all resources that can help to define and realise these ethical objectives. AI technology can support wisdom for the common good.

The AI technotopia is faster and more consequential than the industrial revolution.



Image generated by AI

Eco v Ego: the footprint of our consumerism

Liz Jakimow

Communications Officer, ACC&C

It was a spectacular opening night for “Eco v Ego: the footprint of our consumerism” by Anatoly Golobokov, which was exhibited at the Chapel in May. The night featured speeches by Anatoly, his daughter Katya, Clive Hamilton and Garth Heron from Stromlo Energy. There was also a mesmerising performance by renowned cellist David Pereira composed especially for the occasion, as well as a digital media display featuring Anatoly’s artwork.

Anatoly Golobokov would be well known to many supporters of the Centre for his intricate and beautiful Florentine mosaics, which have been admired by all those who saw them in previous exhibitions at the Chapel. For this exhibition, Anatoly has gone in a different direction, using upcycling to refashion old goods into impressive works of art. The artworks are not only visually stunning, but also shed light on the way our consumerism impacts the planet. The exhibition included quotes and descriptions around the walls that helped people to think about the various ways our consumerism is damaging our earthly home.



'Eco v Ego: the footprint of our consumerism', exhibition by Anatoly Golobokov, photos by Liz Jakimow





Clive Hamilton on *Living Hot: Surviving and Thriving on a Heating Planet* in conversation with ACC&C's Jonathan Cole

Toni Hassan

Adjunct Research Scholar, ACC&C

If I was writing for a tabloid about the event held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in late July – Clive Hamilton in conversation with Jonathan Cole to discuss the new book *Living Hot* – the headline would scream: *Hamilton says “We are screwed, but not totally screwed”*. That’s what he actually said.

A more optimistic and more polite version would read: *“Hamilton charts a course for resilience”*.

Hamilton said, drawing on the new book, that we could avoid being “totally screwed” if we *adapted* to what’s coming. Until now we have almost exclusively concentrated on *mitigating* what’s coming, by trying to reduce carbon emissions.

The switch in focus would involve recognising that there’s not much a country of Australia’s size can do to stop the global climate changing and that even the countries responsible for most of the emissions won’t be likely to do enough.

Adaptation, by among other things, resettling communities, could save lives.

Hamilton, Professor of Public Ethics at Charles Sturt University, and his co-author, energy expert George Wilkenfeld, speak bluntly. They’ve reason to.

They are among the early prophets who have long warned of the possibility of extinction. Scientists say the 2015 Paris Agreement to try to keep warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels won’t be met. We are heading for 2.5 to 3°C.

“A child born in 2020 will experience seven times more extreme heat waves than someone born in 1960,” Hamilton told his Canberra audience. By 2040, the 2019 Back Summer year will look like an average year.

Heat kills many more people than the cold, many of the elderly.

Economist Ross Garnaut, scientist Alan Finkel and others who have talked up the gains to be had from transitioning to net-zero emissions have given us “false hope.” Their talk of technological fixes has made the Australian Government and citizens complacent when we should have been preparing to adapt.

Mitigation and adaptation are not binary opposites, but the fixation on one (including the “pipe dream” of carbon capture and storage and now the “distraction” of nuclear power) has taken our attention away from the other, even while heatwaves grow.

Hamilton said the only communities in Australia that have embraced adaptation are those that have suffered severe floods. He told the audience who gathered in the Chapel at the ACC&C that his talks get a bigger reception in regional towns than in cities for that reason.

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The key ingredients for adaptation seem to be suffering (at least empathy) and political will. The entire town of Grantham in Queensland was moved to higher ground after a flood because of the efforts of a persuasive mayor.

Soon after, old Grantham flooded again. New Grantham was safe. Millions of dollars of rescue costs and insurance payouts were saved.

China, now the world’s biggest emitter, and one of the few nations that could do a lot in its own right to slow climate change, was itself devoting a lot of effort to adaptation, said Hamilton, which ought to tell us something.

For Australia, Hamilton and Wilkenfeld recommend a new cabinet-level national climate adaptation minister who would help three levels of government triage towns and settlements and build climate-proof infrastructure.

There would be no new housing developments in areas subject to high risks of bushfire, floods and coastal erosion and faster adaptation strategies for primary production in anticipation of animal heat stress, declining crop yields and shrinking patches of land suitable for growing food.

The Commonwealth would manage internal migration, deterring people from going north and overseeing the retreat to the south, but a lot of the decision-making would have to be local.

Food and energy would also have to become more local to build resilience. Local micro-grids, powered by batteries, solar panels and diesel generators would be needed to keep food and medicines cold and people cool. Insurance, increasingly undeliverable privately, would have to become a public-private partnership.

Cole asked Hamilton: What grounds are there for optimism that could help us do more than survive but to “thrive” as the subtitle of your book suggests?

Hamilton didn’t really have an answer, except that Australia was wealthy and resourceful and that early action on adaptation would give us better chances than late action.

He said he finds hope in seeing “Communities where people are building resilience together and doing it cooperatively, democratically. They are making themselves physically safer and supporting environments that are caring, and in touch with the natural world.”

The local decision-making that Hamilton champions adopts what could be called “feminist” principles; among them power sharing and valuing safety above everything else.

This book is a welcome and important contribution but could have said more about what genuine care might look like,

teasing out what new economic structures can enable the changes needed to truly liberate communities for meaningful labour that sustains ourselves and the places we rely on for sustenance.

Hamilton said success at the local level relied on cooperation and yet he played down the significance of Australia’s role in reducing global emissions. Cooperation is surely required at every level, for symbolic and practical impacts. Moral or symbolic action generates meaningful movement.

Things that have been achieved against near-insurmountable odds when nations, small and large, have worked together, among them ending Apartheid and vaccinating much of the world against COVID.

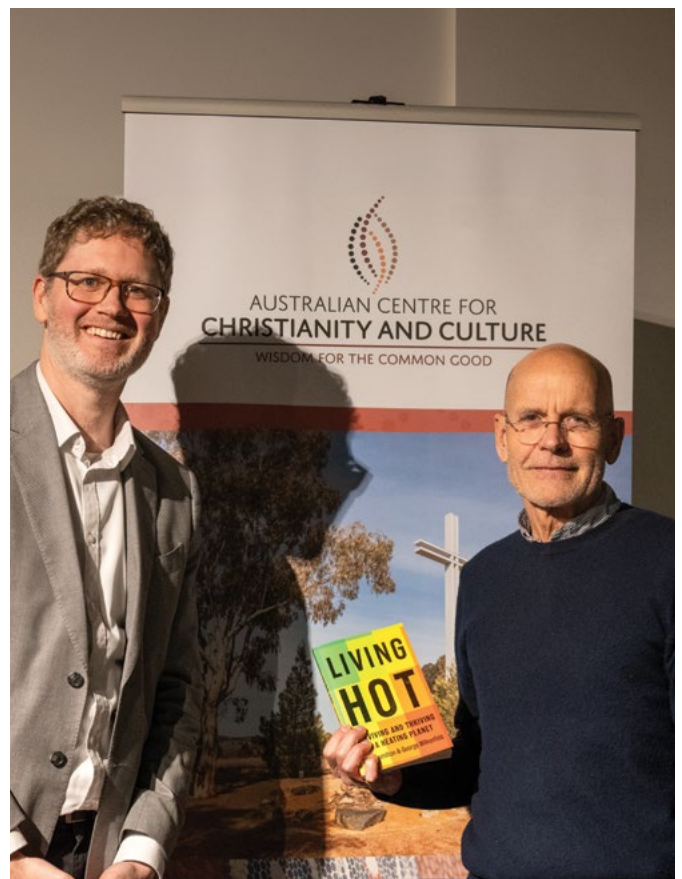
Some of the questions Hamilton faced were hostile. Most were respectful. When we have invested so much in fighting climate change, the idea that we should prepare to live with a punishing climate is no doubt unsettling.



Clive Hamilton, photo by Liz Jakimow



Question from an audience member with Jonathan Cole and Clive Hamilton, photo by Liz Jakimow



Jonathan Cole and Clive Hamilton, photo by Liz Jakimow



Living Hot: Surviving and Thriving on a Heating Planet

Robbie Tulip

Board member, Christians for an Ethical Society (CES)

For more than two decades, Clive Hamilton has brought a scientific perspective to Australia’s climate policies, refuting popular errors. *Living Hot*, co-authored with George Wilkenfeld, continues this work with essential information that makes a welcome contribution to public understanding. Most interestingly, they challenge the belief that cutting greenhouse gas emissions could do much to address Australia’s climate situation. This analysis should prompt wide debate about climate strategies, focused on their argument that we must adapt to life on an Earth where dangerous warming is inevitable and irreversible.

Living Hot rightly observes that we are failing to prepare, due to denial, distraction, wishful thinking and untethered optimism, and that this failure prevents us from building the resilient society we need to cope with climate change. Denial of climate science continues to grow, alongside the false belief that cutting emissions could significantly slow warming. *Living Hot* undercuts these rival myths by explaining that reducing Australia’s emissions cannot mitigate the peril of a climate that could be 3.5°C warmer. The authors say we must adapt by transforming our whole economy – energy, transport, housing, water, food and more - with intensified planning for worsening risks of extreme weather, sea level rise, bushfires, conflict and climate refugees.

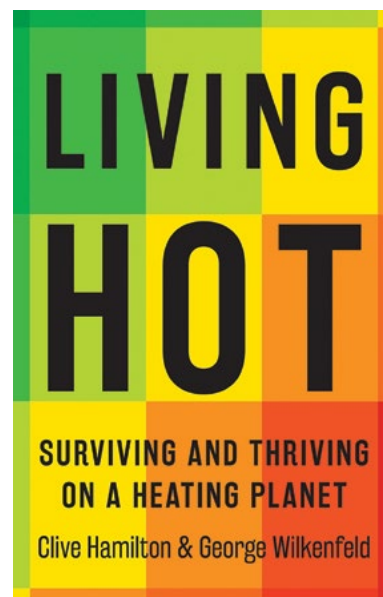
The primary climate risk is that temperature and sea level rise from accelerating feedback processes could overwhelm our resilience. Thriving into the future, as suggested in their title, could prove incompatible with the opening call in *Living Hot*, to abandon all hope of return to a safe climate. A 3.5°C warmer world would be largely unliveable, and should be unacceptable. World emissions are higher than ever, with the rate of increase still accelerating. Emission reduction alone cannot possibly hold warming below 2°C. Their call for adaptation is essential, but does not go far enough.

A contrasting approach, presented in the recent article “Global Warming in the Pipeline” by the renowned climate scientist James Hansen and colleagues, is for the world community to prevent climate calamity by using solar geoengineering. Reflecting more sunlight back to space could reverse the darkening of the planet from loss of ice, snow, clouds and aerosols. Falling reflectivity, or albedo, is a major indirect result of emissions. Hansen finds that reduced albedo since 2015 is equivalent to a sudden increase of atmospheric CO2 from 420 to 530 parts per million.

Solar geoengineering could mitigate risks of warming. *Living Hot* dismisses geoengineering as long debunked, but recent scientific papers estimate that annual investment of around \$20 billion to rebrighten the planet could prevent damage worth \$10 trillion. Advocates say well-governed geoengineering could safely return temperatures close to Holocene levels in this century. This international policy shift could work alongside the national responses proposed in *Living Hot*, in a precautionary approach that could prevent global tipping points from swamping adaptation efforts. Geoengineering can buy time, cooling the planet while the much more difficult, slow and expensive tasks of fixing carbon problems and adapting our systems continue.

Living Hot asserts we have the means to make Australia much safer but only lack the resolve. This vision needs to combine adaptation with the most effective cooling methods. Even if cutting emissions cannot slow warming, things are not hopeless. Australia could lead action to rebrighten the planet by cooling the Southern Ocean, stabilising temperatures as a step toward climate resilience.

Our psychological failure to plan for a hotter world is reflected in the tiny 3% of disaster spending now allocated to prevention. If *Living Hot* prompts honest discussion of how to prevent disasters, including by research into cooling technologies, it will make a historically essential contribution to Australian and global wellbeing.





Visit to the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture by Prof Anne Pattel-Gray

Jonathan Cole

Director of CRES

On 18 June, the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture was treated to a visit by leading Indigenous theologian, Prof Anne Pattel-Gray, Head of School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Divinity in Melbourne.

During her visit, Prof Pattel-Gray gave a seminar on the history and evolution of Indigenous theology in Australia for CSU theologians. Anne specifically covered the Indigenous conception of sin, decolonising theology, the role of place and country in Indigenous spirituality, the role and impact of Blak Theology and the challenges and opportunities confronting the next, and growing, generation of young Indigenous theologians.

In the evening, Prof Pattel-Gray gave a public lecture on reconciliation as part of the Christians for an Ethical Society (CES) forum lecture series. She provided an overview of the intentions and outcomes of a pioneering conference she organised in Melbourne earlier in the year called "Raising our Tribal Voice for Justice: An Indigenous Theological Revolution." She also addressed the impact of the Voice referendum on Indigenous people and challenged the audience to listen to Indigenous people, even when what they have to say is difficult and challenging, and to walk with them towards a better Australia.



(from left to right) Wayne Hudson, Anne Pattel-Gray and Jonathan Cole, photo by Liz Jakimow

Season of Creation

Prayers and Poems

Season of Creation is an annual event that asks Christians to pray and respond to the cry of Creation. It starts on 1 September and continues through to 4 October. Every year, Season of Creation has a theme and this year's theme is "To hope and act with Creation." The symbol is the first fruits of hope, inspired by Romans 8:19-25.

A Blessing for Creation

Creator God,

May we see,

Your love in each other's hearts,

Your joy in the Golden Wattle,

Your peace in the morning sunrise,

Your patience in the mighty mountain,

Your kindness in the Quokka,

Your goodness in the Rainbow Lorikeet,

Your faith in the ancient Grasstree,

Your gentleness in the Leafy Seadragon,

Your self-control in the dry desert plains.

Now with the fruits of the spirit, and all of creation,

Go in truth, justice, love, and hope.

Amen.

By Brooke Prentis

Used with permission by Brooke Prentis. Blessing is able to be used with attribution as follows, A Blessing for Creation by Brooke Prentis - a Wakka Wakka woman and Aboriginal Christian Leader. www.brookeprentis.com and [@brookeprentis.official](https://www.instagram.com/brookeprentis.official)

Nature and I

When I am in Nature, I am mesmerised.
I find myself succumbing to Peace,
as if I am naturally wedded to it,
as if my surrender to its magnetic power
simply affirms a mutual embrace
of knowing our belonging to each other.
There is no *I and thou*.
We are entwined from the seeds of Creation
branching out into the infinite cosmos
invisible to our material world,
intuited from the deepest well
of our subconscious.
Only grace has granted me
with eyes for seeing, with a heart for feeling,
The land, the sea, the sky, and the waters
touch me with infinity.
Only in moments like this do I find myself
utterly effaced from the shadows
of humanity's self-constructed darkness.

By Deborah Wall



Source of all life, Sacred Wisdom

Source of all life, Sacred Wisdom,
prepare our hearts with wonder so we, with amazement,
may meet all that lives and moves in the natural world.
As we listen to silence in nature,
as we follow the journey of a diligent ant,
as we admire the parent bird preparing its young for independence
as we observe the moth perfectly camouflaged
to fit in with the beauty of the bark on the tree,
may we be filled with awe that takes us out of ourselves,
that heals our fears and restores our balance.

Amen

By Ingerid Meagher



Painting by Gangari artist, Kathryn Dodd Farrawell, commissioned by Wellspring for "Healing of the land in GurnaiKurnai" and used with permission.

You can find out more about the Season of Creation, and access further prayers and resources from the following pages:

<https://seasonofcreation.org/>

<https://www.brookeprentis.com/resources-1>

https://www.commongrace.org.au/climate_pray



Upcoming Events

ANSD Quiet Day: Poetry as Prayer

9.30-3pm – The Chapel

Enquiries: Annie Patterson 0450 488 278

17 AUG



CES Forum – Clive Hamilton on Ethics and Climate Change

7.00pm – Chambers Pavilion

14 OCT



Joint exhibition of 'Made with Love' and 'Our story is one'

Baha'i art exhibition – The Chapel

24 SEPT
- 8 OCT



Common Grace Conference: Let Justice Flow

See website for details:

www.commongrace.org.au/2024_conference

16-18
NOV



Spiritus Short Film Prize screening

2.30-5.30pm – Dendy Cinemas

10 NOV





AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

Wisdom for the common good



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.



THE CHAPEL



THE CHAMBERS PAVILION

Email acc-c@csu.edu.au or call 02 6272 6201 for bookings and information.

