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ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Courage in a Post-Truth World

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EDITORIAL

The plebiscite vote confirms the new context in Australia. Simply stated, the days of Christendom are gone, and this issue explores some of the background and the context of the changes that have happened and also changes that are now forecast for Australia in general. Any legal change to marriage will of course have implications for all churches, but the most focus will be on the Uniting Church. The UCA Assembly will consider the Uniting Church's theology of marriage at the 15th Assembly that will be held in Melbourne in July 2018. ACC will prepare further information and advice about the UCA's exploration of marriage over the next two editions of the magazine and also through our websites. This is our way of helping you to understand what is going on and help you respond and give reasons for the hope we have in Christ.

Peace and grace,
Peter Bentley



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Time out!

by Robyn Painter

Pastor, Peterborough Uniting Church

Last Mother's day, in the afternoon I went for a drive over to Mum and Dad's house at Bangor. We thought it might be nice to have a bit of an outing so we went for a drive to the top of the Bridle Track. Before the Port Germein Gorge was discovered, the Bridle Track was the road used to get from Port Germein to Bangor and it goes over the top of the hills.

It's just a two-wheeled track which most people don't know about, but the scenery is very pretty. You can see across to Whyalla, down to Port Pirie and as far north as Port Augusta power station. If you look back east you see hills and more hills. It is all very green at the moment. Anyway, Mum and Dad live about a mile from where the track begins, but being locals they don't go up there much.

Rarely you meet anyone else up there, but that day there was two other cars. One car was a local family, the other was a couple from Adelaide. The Adelaide people said they never travel north without a drive up to the Bridle Track. When we got to the top, I was busy rushing around with my camera. Mum started walking back because she likes to keep fit and Dad was checking football scores on the radio. But the couple from Adelaide got chairs out of their car, poured themselves a drink and just sat to admire the beauty and watch the sunset.

Afterwards I thought, they were the smart ones. We get so caught up in doing stuff. We live in a beautiful world, but we rush our way through each day and we soon forget how good it all is. We no longer see it. It takes an effort to make ourselves stop and look and truly appreciate things.



Humans are not designed to rush all of the time.

The same is true of God. We serve a good and loving God, but when we rush through each day we quickly forget how good he is. The Bible is full of exhortations to be still, to think about, to remember, to wait upon God. It's not something that just comes naturally to most of us. We need to make the decision to stop and think about God and remember all that he has done for us. There is always something else that we could be doing. But surely God is worthy of a place among our priorities!

As God reminds us in Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the Earth."

Robyn

Proclaiming Christ today and forever

Feedback from the annual ACC gathering has confirmed again that it is a wonderful time of encouragement, with excellent Christian speakers and helpful business sessions. The 2017 Conference held at ACC Congregational member Mount Louisa House of Praise in Townsville, enabled ACC to connect more with many of our members in the North Queensland area, though a good number of members from around Australia also ventured to Townsville. A special highlight was the Tuesday night rally with over 150 people hearing Katy Faust speak on Proclaiming Christ in the Family (and make sure you watch the video of her presentation - Katy has a wonderful Christian ministry of love and support for all people).

ACC was very well looked after by the local team at Mount Louisa House of Praise; from all the catering, (and it was a big local effort to cater for nearly 100 people), to leadership of music, and all the practical arrangements, the conference was indeed blessed. Thank you to ML-HOP members; you are all Christian servants. Thank you to Dr David Pohlmann (Lead Pastor) for his chal-

lenging word to help us consider our Christian identity today.

Among the keynote speakers, Ashley Saunders from Family Voice encouraged our members to remain firm and remain in the public space during these increasingly challenging times. Ashley's paper is included in this edition of the magazine.

Historian Dr Stuart Lange from New Zealand spoke about the NZ church experience with many similar issues to that in Australia, providing a timely word connecting our common responsibility to confess Christ in whatever situation we are in.

Bishop Bill Ray (North Queensland Anglican Diocese) gave a wide-ranging and stimulating address on true Christian ministry today, encouraging a hands-on approach to mission, and highlighting the need to reinvigorate the pastoral ministry as a pastoral ministry.

Roberta Stanley (Aboriginal leader) shared about her experiences and hopes in a personal talk filled with biblical references encouraging people to continue to serve God and never to be discouraged as God is with us.

Among the reception of reports and discussing the work of our commis-

sions and state groups, a major part of the business session was led by Rev Dr Max Champion as the gathering spent considerable time considering marriage and the ACC's continuing response to the issues that have been raised. The pastoral letter affirmed by the meeting is included in this edition of the magazine as a record. Discussion also centred on the future of the ACC, post UCA 15th Assembly, and many ideas and thoughts were raised. Further comment will be included in the March 2018 magazine.

If you have not attended an ACC conference, please consider now your plan to come next year. It is a blessed time of support and fellowship, especially for members from non-ACC congregations, with the local prayer gatherings, state networks, and for congregational representatives, it enables them to gain a first-hand account, and to report back to help more members understand the local work and ministry of the confessing movement. The 2018 conference is scheduled for Sydney and is shaping up to be a very important meeting: include the dates in your diary now: 17-19 September.

Peter Bentley



NSW & ACT Synod

ACC was blessed to have a stand (among many groups and agencies) at the 2017 NSW & ACT Synod (29/9-3/10), and Bruce Lyon and Peter Bentley were present during the Synod to meet our members and also interact with other UCA members. A number of productive conversations were held, and copies of the ACC magazine distributed to interested people.

A Yes Era?

While the Yes campaign has succeeded, it is a pyrrhic victory. Given that it was pretty well compulsory to vote Yes in business, the arts, cultural and sporting arenas, public education and service, and the media, the numbers garnered do not do justice to the amount of money that was spent or the influence that was exerted. The Yes leaders must be personally wondering why they could not have done better, and especially why they could not have garnered the incredible and extensive commitment of the volunteers on the No side. Perhaps this was partly complacency; they thought they would win?

Of course, most secular people were not intimately involved in the whole plebiscite debate, and this is consistent with the electorate survey from four years ago that found only a handful of electorates were concerned with the idea of revising marriage.

The vote does raise a question of Why did many secular Australians vote Yes?

While there could be many reasons, some thoughts are below:

- People who simply wanted an end to this part of the debate and thought that voting Yes would at least take the never-ending push for change off the agenda.
- People who genuinely believe that a Yes vote was a simple acknowledgement and affirmation of same-sex couples who wanted to marry each other; a nod to fairness as they perceived it. This is well illustrated by the Yes advertisement that showed equal amounts of orange juice being poured into glasses. If drinks are being distributed within a group, the idea is that all should receive the same. Reducing marriage to a commodity helped some Australians to think it was unfair not to allow all people the same rights. We are now all fundamentally



commercially driven creatures and like to have equal commercial outcomes. Many of these Yes voters would not have considered other issues.

- People who saw a commercial advantage for their own company or business (this was often promoted), or were too afraid to not vote Yes because of financial disincentives.
- People who had come to the point of view that Australia was being left out in terms of change in western English speaking countries, and thought it was damaging our international standing and practical relationships in terms of recognition of marriages of other Western English speaking countries.
- People who know that know there is more to come in terms of an agenda, but believe future changes are an acceptable price to pay for marriage revision now.

- And People who are deeply and ideologically committed to further change and they have already constructed the list with a view to ultimately revising all accepted moral practices that have an underlying Judeo-Christian ethic.

The difficult aspect for Australia in all this is that the ideologically committed are usually the ones that eventually take over, removing the more moderate influences who finally realise they cannot come on board with the full agenda.

Whatever happens in the future, the Church has always had difficult times and times when the practice and beliefs of the society around it have been very different. Indeed, the Church itself has eras of apostasy, but God is always faithful and there is reform and renewal. We do not know the time, but continue to pray and trust in God, and not in the politics of the day or the changing fashions of belief.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13: 8)

Peter Bentley



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13 September 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am writing to you about the Marriage Plebiscite on behalf of the National Conference of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia that met in Townsville, 11-13 September 2017.

The postal survey on marriage is being distributed. This comes at a time when large sections of the business community, the media and many others are actively and aggressively promoting the necessity of same-sex marriage and silencing other voices.

We believe that, if the outcome of the postal vote and subsequent resolutions by the Federal Parliament change the definition and meaning of marriage away from being between a man and a woman, then our public institutions and the church will be irrevocably damaged.

We therefore strongly urge you to vote 'No' in the postal vote.

Marriage between a man and a woman has been the foundation of societies for millennia. Inherently it models gender complementarity and best provides space in which children are raised by their biological parents.

Changing the law will prioritise the desires of adults over the needs of children and intentionally break the bond between any child involved and their biological father and mother.

The ACC notes that President Stuart McMillan acknowledged in his pastoral letter of 28 August 2017, 'The Uniting Church's official definition of marriage is between a man and a woman.' The Uniting Church's understanding of marriage is more fully set out in Doc.bytes Worksheet 3: Marriage at www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine.

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations has already responded to the current debate in its Declaration on Marriage and the Family (November 2016) (www.confessingcongregations.com)

Scripture also teaches that human beings are created in the image of God as male and female (Genesis 1:26) and that marriage is the union of a woman and a man in heart, mind and body (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:9).

We also believe that marriage symbolises Christ's union with his church. That is; a man's sacrificial love for his wife mirrors Christ's sacrifice for his church and the wife's love for her husband mirrors the church's devotion to Christ (Ephesians 5:21-33).

We believe that changing the definition and meaning of marriage will drastically affect the church's liberty to preach the Gospel and serve the world for which Christ died. It will restrict the church's freedom to express that faith in her schools, colleges, hospitals, welfare agencies etc. It will also significantly affect the freedom of Christians to live out their faith in their work places and other day-to-day activities. Conflict will arise for parents who do not want their children to participate in school programs that reinforce the logical corollary of radical gender theory.

We write this letter mindful of same-sex attracted people, many of whom are our friends, colleagues and family members. Our love and support for them is undiminished. We rejoice that all members of the church are called to costly discipleship of Christ by supporting one another in our strengths and weaknesses.

We totally reject the actions of those on both sides of the debate who charge their opponents with being haters and bigots and we are distressed whenever same-sex attracted people suffer from vilification, prejudice and hate speech.

We urge you to respond to threats, real or imagined, by standing firm, turning the other cheek, and praying for our opponents and our nation.

We issue this letter in the power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to serve God who has revealed Himself as Father through Jesus Christ, our Lord and brother.

Yours in Christian fellowship,

Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki

National Chair



PUBLIC SQUARE

B Y P S E U D O - M A X I M U S

The Long March through the Institutions

The result of the plebiscite on same sex marriage is now known. Legislation to change the Marriage Act is likely to be enacted before Christmas. This will not end debate between advocates of the Yes and No cases. The underlying issue is their sharp disagreement about the beliefs which have shaped Western civilization.

The post-same-sex marriage battle is already underway

As Paul Kelly says, “The post-same-sex marriage battle is already underway. This is because while many people genuinely see same-sex marriage as an issue of non-discrimination, this was never its essence. It is an ideological cause seeking fundamental changes in Western society, laws and norms. It will continue apace after the law is changed.” (The Australian, 13 September, 2017, p14)

The Master Plan

The campaign is the result of a master plan, inspired by the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937),

known as the ‘long march through the institutions.’ He realised that undermining cherished traditions is best carried out, not by violence, but by gradually and imperceptibly gaining control over political parties, trade unions, churches, voluntary associations and the mass media. Success depended on the appearance of expanding familiar freedoms and rights when, in fact, they were being absorbed into a totally different world-view.

Since the 1970s, this process has led to such freedoms and rights being uprooted from fertile ground in Christian faith and reason and replanted in the arid soil of self-referential individualism. Equality, justice, freedom and love are no longer

located within God’s transcendent goodness or universal obligations. They are not to be found outside ourselves, but in our feelings, emotions and desires. National identity is not now treated as a God-given blessing for which to give thanks, but as an inherent entitlement to be asserted and claimed.

Identity is now derived from the individual’s right to realise their potential. Thus, restraint is regarded as a violation of their freedom, provided that they tolerate others’ choices. The only people who cannot be tolerated are those who challenge this nihilistic subversion of faith and reason. Ironically, this radically new and more tolerant world-view must be enforced by the State. What Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) called ‘repressive tolerance’ is justified on the grounds that Christian beliefs must not be tolerated.

The long-term impact, as Dyson Heydon, a former Justice of the High Court of Australia, notes, is serious. “Now the modern elites in seeking to marginalise Christianity are not only rejecting the cultural tradition of Christianity. ... They are also rejecting that fundamental part of the Christian tradition that is the source of the modern world and of their favoured part in it. They are doing it whether they realise it or not.” (The Weekend Australian, 4-5 November, 2017, p20)



Antonio Gramsci

Naivety and Deception

This situation is not new. Christians who opposed elements of pagan culture or resisted tyranny were not tolerated. Many were persecuted or martyred. But it is new to Christians living in societies that, until recently, acknowledged the contribution of Christian faith and reason to their laws and culture. Today, many Christians, who are unaware of the long march being undertaken through the institutions since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, cannot comprehend or respond to the current subversion of Christianity.

The relentless drive to enshrine in Federal and State legislation beliefs and practices, such as abortion on demand, same-sex marriage and assisted suicide, demonstrates that the 'culture of life' grounded in the Christian tradition is being steadily eroded and mocked.

The silence of church leaders on the UCA's doctrine of marriage, Assembly's endorsement of non-binary sexual relations, and public support by ministers and parishes to change the Marriage Act, show that the radical difference between Christian and libertarian world-views is either not recognised or thought not to be of vital importance. The symbolic misuse of the rainbow is testimony to this deception.

Decisions by the National Assembly on sexuality and marriage, and the public silence of UCA leaders on the impact of changes to the Marriage Act on churches, synagogues, mosques etc, are signs of tacit acceptance of this nihilistic ideology. Self-appointed cultural elites coordinating the troops on the long march through the institutions have found willing foot soldiers among UCA officers. Tragically, many who have been enlisted to do battle with principalities and powers that threaten God's purpose for human flourishing, have abandoned their post and joined the army of Dionysius, god of the passions, where desires, feelings and emotions are cultivated, deified and ruthlessly enforced.

Religious freedom or Christian witness

The situation will not be remedied by campaigning for exemptions! Certainly, the protection of religious freedom in Australian human rights law is weak. But treating Christian teaching on sex, marriage and the family as one among many beliefs in a pluralistic society maintains the public perception that faith in God is purely a private matter. Better to resist the toxic world-view that undergirds the clamour for radical change and dare the State to exercise its 'repressive tolerance'.

Leaders who are silent on the UCA's clear doctrine of marriage, thereby sabotaging the Christian doctrine of creation, will not be heading the resistance. Instead, by establishing 'Space for Grace' as an 'open process' to discuss marriage, and banning references to the Bible, they are leading a church that is not clothed with 'the whole armour of God' (Ephesians 6:6-17), but with the flimsiest faith bought with cheap grace.

UCA leaders have mastered the tactics of the long march. They extol the virtues of diversity, acceptance, love, compassion, justice and tolerance but reject the clear word of Scripture. They work hard to appease the moral sensibilities of unsure members and accuse

dissidents of intolerance. They have ensconced LGBTIQ folk in positions of leadership and recognised same-sex couples married in other countries for ordained ministry in the UCA. Long ago, the Trojan horse, hiding soldiers trained to implement and enforce the nihilist agenda, was wheeled into the UCA. Unlike the reaction of the citizens of Troy, the enemy within has been enthusiastically welcomed.

The long march through the institutions is reaching its destination. When same-sex marriage becomes law in Australia, victory over the forces of faith and reason will be assured. A culture imperfectly shaped by the Christian vision of God's creative and redemptive grace, will be subverted by a myopic vision of reality. Subsequent changes to laws governing the family, business, education and entertainment will be enacted with authoritarian zeal. As overseas evidence shows, the prospect of a new tyranny cannot be discounted.

If, in 2018, the UCA Assembly were to endorse same-sex marriage or Sacred Union Ceremonies for same-sex couples, it would share the victory of the long march through the institutions. But it would have disqualified itself from the long march to the promised land, begun in Israel, embodied in Christ, and awaited by the Church, when, by God's grace and power, all things will be made new.

Leaders who are silent on the UCA's clear doctrine of marriage ... will not be heading the resistance.



Niceness does not override Lordship for Christians

Friday Forum is an on-line Victorian and Tasmanian Synod forum and the Synod newspaper Crosslight included two articles, and a series of letters as part of the focus for the September print edition on a forum theme: "Do Christians need to do more to show that they have a diversity of opinion on same-sex marriage?"

ACC Council Member, Rev. Walter Abetz provided one of the articles. In this year of many reflections about the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, ACC members will be pleased to see the highlighting of the connection between the confessing movement, the UCA's Basis of Union and the reformation witnesses.

On a first reading of Rev Isabel Greenall's Friday Forum post, I mentally congratulated her for adopting a conciliatory tone towards people who do not share her position. But on a more careful reading, I became aware that I was subtly classed with the uncompassionate, bottom-of-the-class theologians who simply don't get it yet.

Whenever one holds a position with deep sincerity and some erudition and logic, one longs for other people to come on board – and one cannot help but think that the other side is in some way defective in their understanding, compassion, or logic.

Allow me to push back a little on this *we-know-best* attitude that apparently comes with a full stop that brooks no further questions. Pastoral issues arising out of the plebiscite need to be considered also, but that would require another article on its own.

I shall put the case against same-sex marriage, quite deliberately, from a Christian viewpoint consistent with the Basis of Union. Historical Christianity does not permit 'self-definition' and 'my experience' to be the ultimate values. Instead, Scripture nourishes and regulates both our faith and obedience.

As Christians we are called to be in the world but not of it. The Christians at Rome were exhorted to have their minds renewed – Pagan worldviews are different from the biblical worldview (Romans 12).

It is instructive to google "Frankfurt School" and "Intersectionality", and wonder at the suppression of religion in the public education system – suppression in the name of niceness to certain minority groups. There are philosophi-

cal and theological presuppositions on which same-sex marriage is affirmed.

Brexit and Trump indicate that there is some unease with the culture of selective niceness and selective compassion.

Christianity is not a culture of niceness. It is a culture of severe mercy and tough love. Leviticus 19:17-18 declares that you hate your brother, if you do not correct him, when he operates outside of the law. Paul wrote to the Ephesians in 4:20 "*You have not so learned Christ!*" And Hebrews 10:24 speaks about "Provoking one another to love and good works". From these instructions, one would get the impression that niceness and tolerance (a pseudo love) are not ultimate values for Christians. We need the renewal of our minds, if we are to truly acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord.

Lordship is a "no-no" in the culture of niceness. Yet the grand narrative of the Bible does not allow 'my experience' to ontologically overrule God's expectations of me. If we are indeed created in God's image, individually and in relationship (Trinity!), then the Maker's instructions need to carry some weight. The grand narrative of Scripture, as narrative, will nourish our faith and give background to our obedience, and the particularities of God's demands will regulate our obedience. That is the plain reading of Paragraph 5 of the Basis of Union.

There are ministers, elders and members in the UCA who would rather not be tied down to the Basis of Union. They have stated that they have a *different* understanding of the Reformation witnesses (cf. Paragraph 10 of the Basis of Union). That is why the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church was initiated immediately after the 2006 Assembly. Within the context of Paragraphs 5 to 11 of the Basis of


Union, the Uniting Church would find it a severe challenge to celebrate same-sex marriage for its members and adherents. It would be a departure from the Basis of Union (and the substance of the faith!). In particular, the Uniting Church Assembly has not yet followed Paragraph 11. It has not held extensive discussions with the worldwide fellowship of the church to discern the will of God.

Now for the social aspect: currently there are powers at work to remove "the Church" from the corridors of power. I am not overly concerned about that, in the final analysis. On past performance, I am unlikely to give up my faith because people adhering to a "culture of selective niceness" are "not nice" to me. I am resilient, by the grace of God.

Whether the state should allow same-sex marriage is a sociological question in a democracy. There are sociological consequences which will be seen differently by people with different presuppositions (e.g., the Frankfurt School). As a Christian I will vote against same-sex marriage in the plebiscite, as I still have a right to cast my vote in accordance with my beliefs. If the state allows same-sex marriage, I will hand in my state authorisation as a religious marriage celebrant. This authorisation is an anachronism in an increasingly secularised state.

As I hold my position with deep sincerity and some erudition and logic, I long for other people to come on board – and I cannot help but think that Isabel side-steps the Basis of Union, just as she thinks I hold an uncompassionate view. Our presuppositions are currently mutually exclusive, but recognising that may be a starting point for discussion.

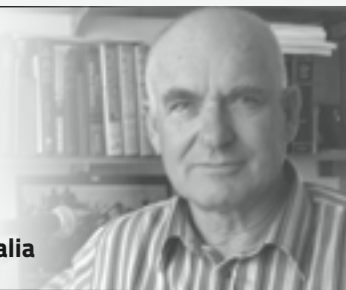
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 *Greenall's article see: crosslight.org.au/2017/08/11/*

What is? Meek?

Ian
Clarkson

UCA Minister - South Australia



Is Jesus still meek? What is meek anyway? Has meek, paired with mild, and damaged our understanding of how Christians should fight? This is not the place for discussing the huge subject of a 'just war', pacifism, non-violent protest or civil disobedience. But meek is not synonymous with quietist behaviour, shyness or mildness.

Moses was the meekest man on earth. He trusted and received whatever Yahweh would do with him. His example demonstrated that meekness is formed first in our relationship with God, then towards others. Meekness is not mildness or timidity. Only a bold person can be meek. Paul prayed for boldness in ministry more than anything else and sort to walk in the meekness which he taught the church. The word akin to it is gentle. Gentleness or humility is controlled and purposed strength. A weak person cannot be gentle.

Jesus Christ was meek so he could help us learn the ways of the New Covenant. Jesus is still meek as he sets in play the great judgments upon the earth because of its sin and treatment of his faithful bride.

Meek makes mighty. Alongside prayer it is part of spiritual warfare and the deployment of Christ's church in the daily victorious lives of believers. Meekness is taking up the fight for righteousness, in righteousness, with hearts afire with love for God. It is jealousy for the honour of our Redeemer.

Paul used the basket in Damascus, his citizenship in Jerusalem to avoid a beating and his knowledge of Roman law to embarrass the Philippian magistrates and to get a trip to Rome. We may likewise walk in meekness and take up similar ways in our day for his Kingdom. Perhaps countering with our own 'offence' complaint under anti-discrimination laws that are being used so freely against

Christians today, or bringing into play a term like 'Christianophobia', to counter the free and unfair use of phobic language against Christians. In a blasphemy-peppered and 'omg' culture confidently stating the truth at all times. When something good is mentioned in the flow of conversation, affirming with a 'thankyou Jesus', straight and clear.

Turning the other cheek, and giving your tunic as well as your cloak, were ways of conquering secular and abusive power with superior intelligence (wisdom) and character. Suffering with Jesus has more to do with the taking of wounds as a battle is fought rather than passive quietness. Our Lord's passion was the wounds that he took while he smashed through the gates of hell, making his Accuser choke on the accusations against the redeemed. Jesus Christ did all in the might of his Father and we can follow. Meek makes mighty!





Virtual Reality

Rod
James

Minister of the Word - South Australia



Younger generations have grown up in a world that is partly made up of what is called virtual reality. That is, electronically or technically contrived visual and sound experiences that vividly and virtually mimics the real world. Virtual reality looks real, but has intended distortions of reality. The new virtual world provides those who live in it with satisfying gratification as they pretend that what is 'virtual' reality is actual reality.

Such recent, but significant, additions to human life have prepared those human beings who are immersed in them to happily embrace a world in which things that are not actually true can be accepted as being virtually true for those who want them to be true. Having become comfortable in such a 'world' they see no harm or problem in accommodating other people's virtual realities if that is what makes them happy. Indeed, to deny the virtual realities of others would be unfair and an exercise in inequality.

And so, today, of human identity and relationships, it is deemed okay, even good and just, to have virtual gender (the gender you would prefer to be), virtual men (i.e. transmen), virtual women (transwomen), virtual intercourse (anal, or by mutual masturbation), virtual marriage (homosexual marriage), virtual fathering (provided by women) and virtual mothering (provided by men). Some societies are replacing biological mothers and fathers on birth certificates with 'legal parent one' and 'legal parent two'. By obscuring the truth of actual parentage, this virtual reality replaces historical data recorded on behalf of children with the intentional aspirations of adults in relation to children.

When it comes to the members of a society accepting the promotion of the latest virtual realities, the process of acceptance slowly advances towards a tipping point. This tipping point may simply be the point where a majority in the society have accepted (or appear to accept) the promoted virtual truth. This majority point is significant because human beings love to be on the winning side, and generally don't want to be left as a 'dinosaur' on 'the wrong side of history'. Financial advantage also plays a major part in making the tipping point crucial. Commercial interests understand that it is important for them to be seen as progressive, and on the side of the modern majority. The greater the majority, the greater their enthusiasm and support for that view regardless of its reality. Personal advantage is also a factor when your company or professional association comes out in support of the new reality. Who wants to be fired or deregistered! In political and social circles, there is reward to be had in what is called 'virtue signalling'. That is signalling to those who scrutinize you that you have that virtue of affirming the new thing now deemed to be right and good. Another benefit can be gained if you get in before your opponents whom you can expose as unvirtuous because they have not made the required affirmation.

And so it is that the society afflicted with virtual reality is made up of three basic kinds of people: those who happily pretend; those who, for reasons of group coercion or personal advantage, pretend that they pretend, and those who just can't or won't pretend.

But to validate the virtual world across a society, everyone needs to go along with the pretence. You just can't have obnoxious misfits trying to burst the virtual-world bubble and spoiling it for everyone else. Suppressing the truth with untruth inevitably requires suppressing any person who insists on upholding the truth. The Bible calls this virtual or pretending process 'suppressing the truth in unrighteousness' (Romans 1:18).

Once the virtual world is accepted by the majority in a society, nonconforming people can be intimidated into silence, and laws can be passed to outlaw any expressions of the truth which might threaten the new virtual

• *in a Pretend World*

truth. Anyone bucking the system can find that they are breaking the law, their employment is under threat, their professional credentials can be revoked, privileges can be withheld, and social inclusion can be denied.

Whether the virtual reality being created is a personal, social or political construct, the process of suppressing the truth does not and cannot end well. Virtual reality is not authentic reality, and as more and more virtual realities usurp actual realities, greater and greater coercion is needed to enforce the pretence. History is littered with formerly great societies that were overcome and destroyed by imposed untruths which demanded ever increasing limits to freedom of thought, conviction and speech. Where the controlling powers enforcing the untruths were powerful and brutal enough, the virtual-world could be sustained, even for an extended time. But eventually truth prevailed. Caesar wasn't really God after all, and Aryans weren't really superior human beings.

It is important to finish this reflection on a positive note. We are all familiar with the metaphor of Pandora's Box, which, once opened, disgorged undesirable things that could not be gotten back in the box. It is not generally known, however, that the last thing to come out of Pandora's Box was hope.

Hope has been destined to come through the young. The fable of the king's beautiful clothes enacts the way in which an unreality, ignored or approved by adults' is blown out of the water by the young of that society. A little boy, the least influential of all in the kingdom, bursts

[cont...]



DEVOTION

Hearing the Word of God Mutual Encouragement

Romans 1:12

*"That you and I may be mutually encouraged
by each other's faith"*

In God's house and amongst God's people we are
"mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

Together we lift our combined voices
in joy and praise to our God.

For one member of the Body of Christ to be absent
affects the whole Body.

Faith becomes the key for us to become
"mutually encouraged".

Our faith must be a living faith,
as it was for the woman

who touched the hem of Jesus' garment,
or the one who was bent double for 18 years.

In spite of their disabilities they continued to believe
because of their living faith.

Faith that we keep to ourselves will shrivel.

The faith that we can share
with our fellow travellers in Christ
must grow and become a living faith in us.
When Jesus challenges us with the words

"O you of little faith,"

He is not only talking to us individually
but also to God's gathered people.

The more we share our faith amongst each other,
the stronger the faith
of the congregation becomes
and the more meaningful is our worship,
and the better we are able
to repel the fiery darts of the evil one.

*Reverend Bob Imms is a member of the
ACC Southern Cluster in Tasmania.*



Virtual Reality

... the bubble of unreality by innocently exclaiming, "But the king has got no clothes!"

As it is written:

*'Out of the mouth of babes
and infants,
you have established
strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the
avenger.'*

Psalms 8:2, Matthew 21:16

*And again '...a little child
shall lead them.'*

Isaiah 11:6 (ESV)

On many occasions in our recent history it has been the children, hurt by virtual-world pretences who, on growing up, have testified about the wrong the adults have known about, but have approved, or at least tolerated. Most recent has been the sexual abuse of children. Others have been the 'stolen generation' of aboriginal children, the 130,000 children who, following the Second World War, were taken from their homes in Britain and sent to Australia, and the babies forcibly taken from single mothers and adopted out in the 1950s and 60s.

Just now emerging, are the children of same-sex couples who have been deprived of their biological mother or father in order to fulfil the parenting desires of two men or two women. Against huge social pressure, and branded as bigots and hateful homophobes, some of these children, now adults, are courageously beginning to speak up about the result of the virtual reality of same-sex parenting. They have quite a bit in common with the other groups of children I have mentioned, and like those groups it will take time and painful persistence for them to be heard and their reality acknowledged. Until the tipping point comes they will be ignored and derided.

One of these children, Katy Faust, has publicly announced the problem by starting a website called them before us.com. That is, the needs of children before the wishes of us adults. On this website the protesting stories of many of these children can be heard.

The good news is that the truth will emerge, as surely as the dawn reveals the reality that the darkness has been hiding.



ACC Chair Celebrating Communion



ACC National Conference 2017

September 11-13:
Mount Louisa House of
Praise, Townsville



Hedley Fihaki & Ian Weeks
Business Sessions



Rev Lu Senituli



Alton Bowen & Ashley Saunders



Ashley Saunders, Katy Faust
& Stuart Lange



Mealtime



Katy with Bowen Tongan Choir



Mealtime



ACC Members Helping at Mealtime



Outdoor Dining



Professor Pat Noller, Katy Faust
& Ashley Saunders



Worship at the Conference



Bowen Uniting Church Tongan Choir



Rev Dr Stuart Lange



Roberta Stanley



Dr David Pohlmann

What next?



Wontulp-Bi-Buya Graduating class of 2016: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this article may contain images and voices of deceased persons.

Rob Brennan

Lecturer at Wontulp-Bi-Buya College, Cairns



I am 56 years old, 31 years married with two daughters and two grandchildren. These days I am the Theology coordinator at an ecumenical Indigenous theological training college based in Cairns called Wontulp-Bi-Buya. We currently have over 120 students from all over Australia enrolled in five courses. Exciting things are happening in the communities and churches that our people are being trained to lead.

There are times in our Christian walk when we wonder, “What next?”

There is a temptation when we have achieved a lot, or having been doing something for a long time to think that

we have experienced all we can. – The temptation can be to take it easy.

God still has more than you can imagine.

Consider your life. For me, I had a great career as a practical scientist in many industries and over 20 years in ministry with some good parishes and some difficult ones. Lives were changed and I saw God move in power at times. Not as many times as I might have liked, but God often did what people needed rather than what I wanted.

I have seen healings, vision and miracles. There were also trials. There have been the griefs and disputes that tear your heart out. There have been the pastoral evils that give you nightmares even after you surrender them to God.

In my 50s you would think with family grown up ... and a comfortable life in a posh wedding church that I would be winding down to retirement. I’ve done enough! But what do I know?

How is it for you? Do you think you have done enough?

Is it good enough, have you earned God's favour?

These are the dangerous time sin our life and ministry where we can loose sight of where God is leading us. It is easy to take our eyes off the ball.

Is what we have done enough?

We can think good enough is enough. But it is not. Oswald Chambers the author of *My Utmost for his Highest* states, "Good is the enemy of the best."

Consider your life.

We need to refresh our call and ask Jesus to show us how to rely more on Him. That should be easy because Christ is compellingly attractive.

But when we do Jesus is also personally and deeply confronting. – What do we need to change?

Be warned the issues and the answers can and will be uncomfortable and surprising and not always easy to fix. The good news is that as we let Jesus confront us with our reality, He gives us the power through the Holy Spirit to change.

There is hope.

Where to next?

There is more!

I moved. Now I am now working with leaders – for whom miracles and tragedies occur every day. There are great needs including suicide, cancer, domestic violence, alcohol and drug addiction, and depression.

But there is hope.

- Cairns: a small group did a prayer walk for their community at Yarrabah - in which over 6 people were healed and 6 saved and one rescued from suicide.
- Kowanyama: There are people coming to God and being changed after an incident where someone drove a car through a funeral.
- Aurukun: 1000 of 1200 people in a community attending church. (See John Sandeman's report in *Eternity* October 2017)
- Yirrkala, Gove, and Arnhem Land: Packed nightly meetings have been happening in the community for months.
- An old friend had returned in retirement to various communities in Arnhem to lead what he described as "small" bible studies – one of them had attendances of 1000's afternoons and evenings for a week.



We teach our students how to do outreach. One important step is getting them to tell their story of coming to faith. In one small group of 3, one talked about his coming to faith after a detailed near death experience. Another described having a vision and talking with Jesus while he was talking with his minister.

There are many stories of visions of Jesus and heaven – some even have photos! I hear stories of healings and even the occasional resurrection. All this happens with no fuss.

Why don't we often hear about these exciting things? – Some of it comes from the historical disconnection between Indigenous and other Australian communities. But mostly I think it is simple humility and faith. Some of the people I have met who have been at the heart of the most exciting things honestly do not see why others find these things so amazing. Their thinking is, "if you trust God and respond in repentance to the good news these things happen. God promises it, of course it happens – Why are you so surprised?"

Where will God call us next? I do not know, but I know that there is more?

Who of us is willing to commit themselves for the journey?

I have just gone to Normanton for a conference where a hundred people were camping and sharing their lives in God. I thought my camping days were behind me. We ended the time with 3 Baptisms in the Gilbert River.

If you seriously seek Jesus afresh, there will be new opportunities and new experiences. But you will need to confront the harsh realities and change or you will be settling for merely the good rather than the best.

Rev Dr Robert Brennan

Children are not chattels



Katy Faust was a keynote speaker at the 2017 ACC National Conference held in Townsville. Katy's presentation at the conference rally on Tuesday night 12th September is a wonderfully moving and pastoral address and can be viewed on the ACC YouTube website: [confessingchrist](http://confessingchrist.com), or via the ACC website.

During her week in Australia, ACC was able to help facilitate Katy speaking at three other major events, including the Coalition for Marriage Launch in Sydney. ACC is pleased to have been involved in ensuring Katy was able to present a wider message of support for marriage and children during this critical moment in Australia's history. There is a significant amount of excellent material now on social media and also in the wider media featuring Katy from her visit. One of the major interviews was conducted by Catherine Sheehan for The Catholic Weekly.

Children are not chattels: an interview with children's rights campaigner Katy Faust

Redefining marriage will effectively redefine parenthood, denying children the right to be raised by their own biological parents, says Katy Faust, an advocate for children's rights from the United States, who was herself partially raised by a same-sex couple. Recently in Sydney, Katy is an outspoken opponent of same-sex marriage and founder of the Them Before Us movement, promoting the needs and rights of children.

Raised by her mother and father until she was ten years old, like many children of divorced parents, Katy split her time between her mum and her dad. She experienced being partially raised in a same-sex household when her mother began a relationship with another woman. She therefore has insight not only into the pain endured by children of divorced parents, but also the dynamics of a same-sex family.

"It taught me that you can appreciate how critical fathers and mothers are to children, while you love your gay family and friends," she said.

"There's no contradiction between those two things."

While some of those advocating for the "yes" vote claim that the definition of marriage has nothing to do with parenting, Katy says it has everything to do with it.

"When you look at other countries that have legalised gay marriage, you see a very uniform consequence—that when you redefine marriage, you redefine parenthood. Around the globe, countries that have redefined marriage have also actually changed parent-child relationships in law."

"Look at the United States, and Ireland, since gay marriage was legalised there's no longer any government or political institution that can recognise a child's right to both their mother and father. To do so constitutes discrimination."

When marriage was redefined in Canada in 2005 close on its heels came the redefinition of parenthood.

"Immediately they went from recognising parent-child relationships based on a biological or natural foundation, to just a legal foundation. So now the State decides who the parent is. That significantly weakens child rights."

In 2016 the Canadian government passed the All Families are Equal Act which removed the terms "mother" and

“father” from law, using the term “parent” instead, and allowing up to four “parents” on a child’s birth certificate, regardless of biological or legal ties to the child.

“It’s very obvious that marriage and parenting policy goes together,” Katy said. “I would say the ramifications go way beyond just two people loving each other. It actually changes the whole way we look at children and children’s rights.”

This redefinition of parenthood and family violates the rights of children as stipulated in the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention, which Australia ratified in 1990, states that a child has the right to be raised by his or her own parents.

“If you’re not going to recognise the child’s right to their mother and father in the marriage debate, where are you going to recognise it? The answer in other countries (where marriage had been redefined) is nowhere,” Katy said.

Redefining marriage means parenthood then becomes defined according to the desires of adults, she said, when it should be based on the welfare of children.

“That changes the whole concept of children from being someone who is the subject of rights—that we orient our lives around—to being the object of rights, somebody who is owed to someone else. That’s not how it’s supposed to work. Children are not commodities.”

According to Katy, biological ties really do matter to kids, for a whole variety of reasons.

“Throughout history, [the] biological basis for parenting has been recognised throughout every culture and religion for good reason,” she said.

“There’s something that biological parents give to children that other adults don’t give, and that is biological identity and the unique capacity to attach, especially for the mother-child bond, from in-utero to after delivery to nurturing and breast-feeding. Children are just wired for connection and it’s hard to replicate that outside of that biological system.”

Katy is herself an adoptive mum and strongly supports adoption but she also recognises that when children lose a biological parent they “suffer loss.” It is “something you can’t recover,” she said.

“Any time a child loses a parent to death, divorce, abandonment or through donor-conception, the child suffers trauma and the trauma actually has long-term implications for the child’s health.”

Social scientists agree overwhelmingly that the biological connection between children and parents leads to better outcomes for children, Katy argued.

“The in-tact home of the married mother and father raising their own children; there’s no other family structure that can replicate those outcomes for kids. So biology matters in parenting.”

“Gender matters in parenting,” she added. “Mothers and fathers do different things. They offer distinct and complementary benefits to children.”

She finds it rather curious that while social science researchers have agreed for decades that children fare

better when raised by their biological parents, it is only recently that some researchers have started saying that children raised by same-sex couples fare just as well.

“They didn’t use rigorous scientific methods to come to those conclusions. What we know from studies that have used rigorous methods of social science, is that kids tend to struggle disproportionately with emotional issues and those family structures tend to be more unstable.”

Katy also has no time for those who put forward the argument that redefining marriage is the “Christian thing to do”.

“Throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament God has identified children in general, and the fatherless specifically, as a demographic that deserves special attention and protection. So we have a mandate to protect the fatherless and to prevent fatherlessness to begin with.”

“To those Christians or churches who have chosen to bend the Word of God to fit this new cultural narrative, I would ask them, if you officiate at a same-sex wedding of two women and they decide to have a child through sperm donation, when that child is 15 and suffering emotional struggles and depression—which disproportionately kids of same-sex couples tend to experience—if they were to ask you ‘how you could approve of me missing out on the fatherly love that I was made for and that I crave, half my biological identity’ what would you say to that kid? Because ‘love is all you need’ just won’t cut it.”

Katy believes that all adults should be protectors of children’s rights and needs. Her movement Them Before Us is designed for those who want to “fight” for children’s rights, she said, and the leadership team is made up of atheists, Christians, gays and lesbians.

“It’s not about your sexual orientation. It’s not about religious verses secular. It’s about adults who recognise how critical mums and dads are, and are defending the rights of kids to have their [own] mum and dad in their life.”

The movement’s website tells the stories of children who suffered the loss of a mother or father. Katy believes that telling the stories of such children is the key to changing hearts and minds on the issue of marriage.

“This whole debate should be about children and their right to their mother and father ... It’s a widely acknowledged universal right and probably the most universal human longing ... I think all of us can say that we long to be known and loved by the two people responsible for our existence”.

“Why would we want to move in a direction that says mothers and fathers are optional, when for kids they never are?”

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Catholic Weekly journalist Catherine Sheehan is an experienced writer who has previously worked for Melbourne Catholic and Kairos: <https://www.catholicweekly.com.au/children-are-not-chattels-an-interview-with-childrens-rights-campaigner-katy-faust/>



Courage *in a Post-Truth World*

Keynote Address to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations 2017 Conference

Ashley Saunders

National Director FamilyVoice Australia



In the sustained attack on godly values in society, one of the biggest victims has been *truth* – so that, increasingly over the decades, many people stopped believing in objective truth – or even that objective truth actually exists.

So that truth became relative, and we started hearing statements such as, “Well that may be true *for you*, but it’s not true *for me*.”

Although most of us may have grown up in an era where truth was valued and where scientific research to *discover* truth held a high place in society, we have come to live in a world described by the term “*post-truth*” – which was named last year’s word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary!

The term *post-truth* relates to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs; so *post-truth* doesn’t so much mean “after truth”, but that the notion of truth itself is irrelevant.

Further, this idea of *post-truth* is closely linked with two other concepts:

- Truthiness; (which relates to the tendency to believe something to be true because it feels right, or because our gut tells us it ought to be true); and
- Confirmation bias (which expresses the idea that we are more likely to uncritically accept ideas or opinions as true if they tend to reinforce what we already believe).

That is, in a post-truth world, people tend to seek out and lend credence to those sources of information that tend to confirm their biases, and they begin to reject the idea that there are any unbiased, objective sources of truth.

Now, this is an issue for those of us who believe that the Holy Bible is God’s Word for His world because, unlike the speculative writings of other religions, the Bible is grounded in God’s loving truth – a truth framed by narrative: what people saw, heard, said, and did.

Further, because we believe that God’s loving truth is good for all society, we not only seek to *hold* to God’s truth, but to *proclaim* that truth – something that requires considerable courage in today’s *post-truth* environment.

1 Courage: The Imperative

The imperative for us to stand with courage for truth in today’s world is simply because God’s loving truth is more important than anything else.

The early Christians knew this truth, and rather than proclaim ‘Caesar is Lord’ they proclaimed ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ even though, in doing so, they faced serious consequences, even the possibility of gruesome death.

What’s more, they risked the very reputation of the church when they rescued unwanted children left to die of exposure – something not uncommon in the Roman world. Why would rescuing children risk the reputation of the church? Simply because their faithful actions risked the established order of the Roman world, in which human life was disposable – particularly the lives of unwanted children.

Hence lies circulated about Christ-followers and, as with many lies, they were based on a distortion of the facts. Their detractors linked Christ-followers’ observance of the Lord’s Supper with their rescuing children to create rumours that Christians were cannibals, and their loving actions were misrepresented as the actions of barbarians who wanted children to eat.

In risking everything to stand for truth, these early Christians were following the example of the likes of Daniel in all of Babylon, in Mede and in Persia – where, even though his enemies sought to find fault in him, the only fault they could find was concerning his persisting faith in YHWH, the Lord of heaven and Earth (see Daniel 6:1-5). These jealous officials therefore went to King Darius, persuading him to proclaim a law to the effect that anyone who prayed to anyone – divine or human – other than the king would be thrown to the lions.

Knowing the law and the consequences, Daniel risked everything by continuing to pray at home in his upstairs room, as usual; as a result of this behaviour the plotters raised the matter with the king who – although he regretted signing the law – nonetheless upheld the law and threw Daniel to the lions, saying “*May your God, whom you worship continually, rescue you*”. (from Daniel 6:16 NLT).

Daniel knew that there were things far more important than his reputation, his position – or even his life.

And, like Daniel, we, too, are foreigners in an alien land, as attested by Peter – and we, too, are warned to keep away from evil desires that fight against our very souls, and to be careful how we live among our unbelieving neighbours, who may be looking to accuse us of doing wrong (1 Peter 2:11-12).

Perhaps I could best sum up this section on the imperative for courage by using the words of Jesus Christ, as recorded by Matthew:

“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put

aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26 NLT).

2 Courage: The Basis

The basis for the courage we are to demonstrate in standing for God's loving truth is not grounded in who we are, what we have done or can do – but firmly grounded in who God is, what *He* has done, and what *He* will do, even through us!

The Israelites stood on the East side of the Jordan River after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. All they had ever known was wilderness wanderings, and now they faced the prospect of crossing the river and making war with standing armies protected by walled cities; and when they have taken the land, these wilderness wanderers needed to learn how to live in the land, to cultivate it, and to defend it – all things with which they were entirely unfamiliar. What's more, the river was in flood and Moses, the only leader they had ever known was dead; so that Joshua's first action as leader was to lead the people across the flooded river opposite Jericho, a walled and well-defended city.

Why not wait for a few weeks until the flooded water receded?

Why not move up-river and plan to cross to a place with less military significance, and perhaps neither army nor walled city?

The place and time may seem wrong, but because we have confidence in YHWH and in His word, we are also confident that God's time and place are always right; and our basis for courage is identical to Joshua's: *"I command you – be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."* (Joshua 1:9 NLT)

Our basis for courage is the confident assurance of God's presence. And for those of us who live on *this* side of Easter, we hear in God's words to Joshua the echo of words later uttered by Christ himself, whom Matthew records as saying:

"I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

3 Courage: The Legacy

We live in a world where we are encouraged to have a long view – to plan not only for today or even tomorrow or next week, but also to start planning for our retirement income when we start earning income in our teens or twenties. However, even though we are encouraged to have a long-term view in many aspects of life, as Christ-followers, we are called to faithfulness to God's call on our lives and to leave the results to him.

If we are faithful – if we courageously stand for God's truth – regardless of the immediate consequences, we build a legacy of faith; and who knows where that might lead?

For Stephen, of whom we read in the Book of Acts, his courage in the face of death led to many others being willing to remain faithful to death. However, as an increasing number of people came to Christ as a result, the Roman Empire was changed forever: even current museum exhi-

bitions on gladiators attest to the contribution the rise of Christianity made on the decline of gladiatorial conquests and all that went with them.

Biblically, we see a number of accounts of the legacy of God's faithfulness.

Esther, for example, was a young Jewish girl in exile by whose courage the Jewish nation in exile was preserved, and eventually returned to their homeland, in which – a few centuries later – Mary gave birth to the baby Jesus, the Son of God, who was sent by the Father because of His great love for us, His creation.

What Esther did in approaching the king without being called for took enormous courage, and could have had disastrous consequences. However, Esther acted courageously, motivated by those wonderful words of Mordecai: *"Who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for such a time as this?"* (From Esther 4:14)

The remains of the palace where Darius and Xerxes were king – where Esther was queen – can be visited in the Iranian city of Shush (the ancient city of Susa). In that same city is Daniel's tomb, a revered place for Iranian Muslims even today. Although the people who visit the tomb to pray do not understand why Iranian Muslims revere the tomb of a Jewish prophet, the reason arises from Biblical truth. Immediately following the account of Daniel's emergence from the den of lions unharmed, we read that the king (Darius) sent a message to the entire empire testifying that all people should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel: *"For he is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end."* (From Daniel 6:26 NLT)

Could Daniel ever have imagined the legacy of his courageous faithfulness? That, more than 2,000 years after his death, Iranian Muslims would revere his tomb as a sacred place?

But notice this: In Shush, Iran, today the palace of kings lies in ruins, but Daniel's tomb stands strong, and is visited daily by Iranian Muslims, who pray at the tomb, giving thanks for Daniel.

What a legacy?

And who of us here today knows what legacy of faith we can be a part in building as we act and speak with courage in the cause of God's loving truth in this post-truth world we inhabit?

Conclusion: Speaking into a post-truth world

Living in a post-truth world doesn't diminish the importance of holding to God's loving truth; however, it does impact how we communicate:

① When speaking truth to a post-truth world, we should do so calmly, persistently, prayerfully, deliberately, and intentionally – both guarding ourselves against a drift towards truthiness, *and* demonstrating respect for those we encounter; and

② Rather than only speaking truth *reactively* – which still allows others to set the agenda with which we merely engage – we need to find ways to speak truth proactively. With courage, dignity and diligence we should proclaim *proactively* that humility is a virtue, that meekness is strength, that looking out for the other person and caring for the downtrodden are their own rewards, that all people are equal in the sight of God – *and that our very society has been built on these and other values that come straight from our Lord!*

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A Brave New World?

Peter
Bentley

ACC National Director

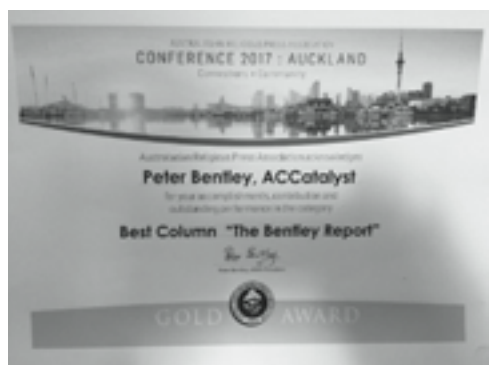


During the period of the marriage survey, I could not help but be reminded of the Huxley novel, *A Brave New World* (1932). It is a truism to say it is a different era today, but it is not so much an era as an experimental age. Huxley was ahead of his time when he wrote about the changes in sexual practice that would develop when sex was disconnected from biological parenting. Fast forward to near the turn of the century and Robin Baker provided a pointer to where we had come and were going in: 'Sex in the Future: Ancient Urges meet Future Technology' (1999). In a publicity comment for his book it was suggested that the brave new world of reproduction "... spells the end of infertility but also of the need for men and women to form relationships at all." Much of what Robin Baker theorised has already come true in terms of access to reproductive technology.

While proponents of same-sex marriage have said it is scaremongering to raise other issues, I would have thought that it was common sense to realise that when you change one established set of laws you end up with more issues to be considered and ultimately more laws and regulations. Taking gender out of marriage moves society not only to legal acceptance of same-sex marriage, but also toward promotion and eventually re-education or exclusion of those who do not agree. The 'gold standard' for most activists is ultimately the endorsement of the new sexual agenda.

Many commentators have highlighted that some of the proponents for a Yes vote, really do not want any other opinion raised. This situation is different from previous times where people disagreed, but one was free at least to stand on a soapbox and say so. The odd thing is that this silencing of opponents is happening in the church as well. In the present managed discussion period in the UCA, it is a rich irony that ACC has been criticised in some circles for providing ACC members with the pastoral letter on the marriage survey (see the letter in this edition), and for information, providing copies to Presbytery, Synod and Assembly leaders as a courtesy. Oddly the critics have not thought fit to complain about the Uniting Churches and ministers and people in some UCA agencies actively and publicly promoting the Yes vote in many different forums. It seems to be increasingly easy for a theological liberal to say they support diversity in the church, and yet lambast those who support the current doctrine on marriage within the Uniting Church. Matthew 7: 3-5 comes to mind!

The marriage survey period has also confirmed that the concept of 'Hate the sin, love the sinner' has no possibility of connecting with a contemporary generation. It is not a statement that people can relate to anymore. Identity is so firmly connected to practice that one cannot separate them, and unfortunately in some circles this has meant sometimes ultimately (perhaps unwittingly), endorsing or pastorally affirming any related behaviour, because not to do so would negate a person's identity. This contemporary brave new world is ironically more focused on the individual than the community, and with the ever-increasing variety of individual practices and identities, there will be an increasing minefield of conflicting ideas and 'rights' to navigate.



Congratulations!

ACCatalyst received a Gold Award at the 2017 Australasian Religious Press Awards held in August. The Bentley Report was named Best Column and the judge commented: "Good clear writing, well-crafted arguments, interesting topics relevant to the readership".

Christian Unity Achieved!

There is no further need for efforts toward Christian unity. The major churches have already attained a sufficient degree of harmony and mutual acceptance to fulfill Jesus's call for unity among Christians in John 10.16 and in His oft-cited prayer in John 17.

Look at mainline denominations, such as the Uniting Church. It has intercommunion agreements, fellowship and joint ventures with other church bodies, and cooperation in local, national, and world council of churches. Any disunity is largely illusory, with the differences being only in nonessentials which other major church bodies are willing to tolerate. In itself, it was an organizational merger of previously separate denominations.

I looked for the meaning of Christian unity as contemplated in the Scriptures, and in the writings of Christians so early they could recall what the Jesus and His first disciples actually did. I aimed to ascertain the meaning of such unity in the practice of the apostles and their first successors, and how "unity" was understood in the next few overlapping generations.

Drawing on Christian sources to the middle of the third century AD, I discovered that "unity" meant attitudes, qualities of character, or modes of relating to people with whom one is in personal contact. In the Biblical sense, it is a pattern of conducting one-to-one interpersonal relations among Christians that fosters peace, love, and harmony at the neighbourhood level. The Scriptures and church fathers never mentioned merger of organizations or bureaucracies.

My research resulted in a magazine article that investigated and countered allegations that the Christian churches today are too fragmented to fulfill Christ's will. The article has since been published in several magazines in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, including *The ACC Catalyst*. The article demonstrated

that there already was, or could easily be at a moment's notice, Christian unity among major denominations, especially at the local and person-to-person level.

If we substitute the phrase "Christian unity" in its Biblical sense for the "organizational unity" or "structural unity" that fringe denominations and many members of mainline churches seem to think was intended, believers of every denomination can practice John 17 now, in their daily lives. Even when we narrow down the meaning of Christian unity to structural or bureaucratic arrangements, there is no longer any sense to regard disunity as a problem, for there exist far too many avenues for churches to cooperate with each other, such as intercommunion agreements, open Communion, unhindered mutual acceptance, joint ventures with other church bodies, and cooperation in local, national, and world council of churches.

True, some church leaders allege that disunity remains, but this may be a mere public relations gesture by some of them. They usually mention it as if it were the only sin of which they are guilty, and hasten to add that they are working hard to overcome it.

In the last hundred years, the tireless efforts of many leaders of major churches and the goodwill of local laity towards their counterparts in other communions have achieved a real, viable, and practical unity through many branches of Christendom, which answers Christ's prayer. Let us honour them or their memories, and concentrate instead on redoubling Christian efforts more towards feeding the hungry masses of the Third World.

How about a "Week of Prayer for Starving Africans"?

Dr. David W. T. Brattston, a Canadian writer, reflects further, following his earlier article on the roots of Christian Unity (published in the June 2015 ACCatalyst).

Courage in a Post-Truth World [...cont from 21]

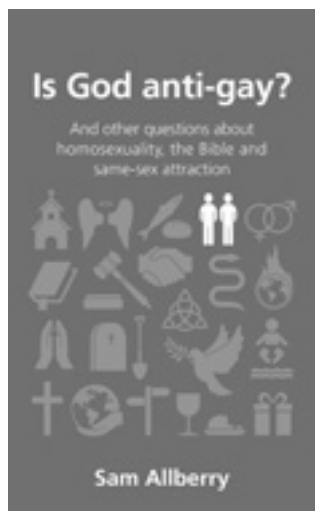
Or, using the words of the apostle Peter, who urged Christ-followers to faithful living in a foreign world:

"You must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But you must do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak evil against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!" (1 Peter 3:15-17 NLT)

Ashley Saunders is the National Director of FamilyVoice Australia, a Christian voice for family, faith and freedom. Prior to assuming this role in December 2016, Ashley practised as a Solicitor in NSW for 19 years, served as an Alderman of Newcastle City Council for 6 years and, over the last 16 years, pastored Baptist Churches in NSW and Queensland.

Rev Ashley Saunders is available to speak at churches throughout Australia.

It's 'the issue', isn't it?



Is God Anti-gay?

Written by
Sam Allberry (2017)
The Good Book Company

If ever there was an issue in the Western world for which Christians feel assailed, then it is homosexuality. Gay rights is a political and social issue that doesn't seem to want to disappear anytime soon, with the push for same-sex marriage seemingly sweeping all before it.

The media seems extraordinarily biased in favour of this agenda, and against those who take a different view. The churches are most certainly the enemy, as far as this debate goes. And so the 'issue' has become one of those things we are known for, like it or not; it is a cause in society with which the Christian community is associated, and not generally in a good way.

The temptation is for church people to forget that this is not 'an issue'. It is not simply about 'us' and 'them' in a political or social argument. It is about real people, many of whom are 'us': the people alongside us in the pews of our churches, and their children. I know I have spoken angrily or aggressively about the 'gay agenda' in such a way that any Christian who was themselves experiencing same-sex feelings would have felt very alienated.

Sam Allberry is a Church of England minister [who was in Australia this year for the Liberty conferences], whom I got to know very well when I was living in Oxford and he was ministering at St Ebbe's. He has written a short book in the series Question Christians Ask entitled 'Is God Anti-Gay?' Sam is well qualified to write this book because he is a great writer, a thoughtful and experienced pastor and a gifted teacher of the Bible. But the question he is addressing is certainly not an abstract one for him. As he explains in the book, Sam himself experiences same-sex attraction; and so this book is written from the inside of the issue. This is vital, since Sam is not simply feeding a Christian plot against gay people. In fact, much of what he says is a gentle rebuke to the way in which Christians have acted with

insensitivity and thoughtlessness towards their same-sex attracted brothers and sisters.

What Sam has done in a very few pages is to give the Christian community the book it has needed for years. That is: he gives us a very clear and uncompromising explanation of the Bible's teaching on homosexual sex in the wider context of the Bible's teaching about human sexuality. He answers directly some of the most commonly asked questions about the Bible's teaching – do we just pick and choose randomly from the Old Testament law? Aren't faithful committed relationships different from what the Bible is talking about and more?

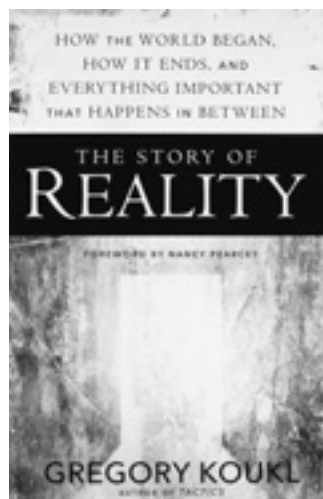
Sam brilliantly explains how sexuality is not the same as identity, and how the gospel helps him to see that. He does not make rash promises about change, although he does know some people who have experienced a change in their same-sex attraction. He also reminds us that the Bible is very positive about singleness as a calling, and doesn't absolutise marriage at all. One of the best sections of the book is the section 'What should I do if a Christian comes out to me?' The advice is exactly what pastors especially need to hear, but any thoughtful Christians as well.

I would really hope that this short book is widely read. It should be available in any church or youth group, and I pray it will be of a blessing to Christians seeking to live a God-honouring and biblically faithful life.

Michael Jensen is rector of St Mark's Darling Point and is the author of the book My God, My God: Is it Possible to Believe Anymore? He's on twitter: @mpjensen

This review was first published at sydneyanglicans.net: July 16, 2013 and slightly modified for ACCatalyst.

The Story Of Reality



The Story of Reality

Written by
Gregory Koukl (2017)
Zondervan

The subtitle of this small volume (less than 200 pages) is "How the world began, how it ends and everything that happens in between" and the

book lives up to that demanding goal by beginning with Creation and finishing with Christ's return. This book presents the Christian worldview in a simple but engaging style that moves the reader through the story in a very accessible and easy to understand manner.

Initially I had a problem with the frequent use of the word 'story' perhaps because I have heard preachers use that word when conveying a certain scepticism about whether the Biblical story they are referring to ever actually happened. As Nancy Pearcey notes in the Foreword, Koukl calls it a story "only because, amazingly, it turns out that reality itself is structured like a great drama".

Koukl sees Christianity as 'a picture of reality' or 'a depiction of how the world really is' and goes on to describe the story of the world in language that everyone can understand.

The book is divided into five sections: Reality (the introduction), God, Man, Jesus, Cross, and Resurrection. In the introduction, he discusses the confusion in our culture about religion in general and Christianity in particular, and why people are called intolerant or bigots for believing that their own personal worldview is correct. He goes on to talk about the four aspects of life that any worldview needs to deal with: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration, arguing that for many people their worldview is just a pile of jigsaw pieces, not really fitting together.

In the section on God, he emphasises that God is a person, although not limited in time and space as we are, and that the story is about him, and not about us. Further, he argues that everything, including us, belongs to God and that a more important issue than God's plan for our lives is giving our lives to God's plan. The main point we need to grasp is that God owns everything in the world and rules over it.

In the section on Man, he emphasizes that Man was created by God and was beautiful, bearing God's own likeness, and in fellowship with him. On the other hand, man is also broken by sin. He argues that there is a set of moral laws given to us by God in the 10 commandments, and an even more demanding set of two given to us by Jesus Christ. Since none of us can be completely obedient to those (at least not in our own strength) and have "broken them all, in many ways, many times over" (p.80), our problem is a moral one and "the world is broken because we are broken".

Arguing strongly that the "Christian story of reality explains these facts adequately", Koukl presents the story of Genesis and the banishment of man from his perfect surroundings in the garden because Adam and Eve succumbed to the wiles of Satan. He also deals at this point with the issues raised by these events in terms of God's goodness and his omnipotence and reasons he might allow evil things to happen. He also emphasizes that trouble and suffering are actually an essential part of the story.

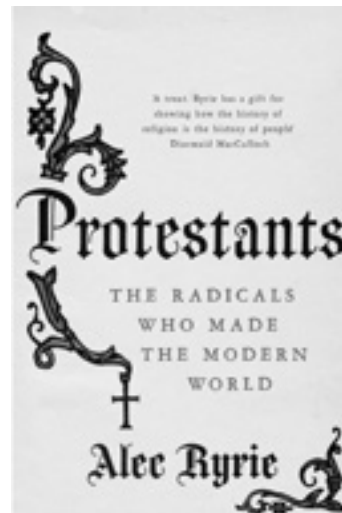
In the section on Jesus, he argues, first of all that there is no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure and argues against those who would claim otherwise, including what he calls the "Recycled Redeemer" view. He draws on the writings of real his-

torians such as those of Pulitzer prize-winning author, Will Durant who argues strongly that Jesus Christ was a historical figure, and there is plenty of evidence to support what has been written about him.

The important questions are the identity of Jesus Christ and what he came to do. Koukl concludes that "Jesus was a true human being" (p.107), although the Jews had great difficulty in accepting that reality and the extraordinary claims that he made. "He is the main player, the character the Story (of reality) is all about" (p.109) and he came to Earth in miraculous fashion (God got small) to live and die and rise from death to rescue sinful people. In coming to Earth, God in Christ laid aside all his divine rights. He came to replace the sacrificial system of the Jews and to be the 'perfect sacrifice' because he was without sin.

Patricia Noller Ph.D, is a member of the Qld ACC Committee.

Protestants: The Radicals who made the Modern World



Protestants: The Radicals who made the Modern World

Written by
Alec Ryrie (2017)
HarperCollins
Publishers

Mark Lilla in his book *The Shipwrecked Mind* summarises the last five hundred years in the phrase "From Luther to Walmart". Such a phrase would be a fair description of Alec Ryrie's book, *Protestants: The Radicals who made the Modern World*, (HarperCollins).

After twenty years of contemplation, Ryrie an Anglican layman, and professor of the history of Christianity at Durham University has written a book that all UCA personnel should read, distil and absorb. In so doing this book would help all Christians and Protestant

[...cont over]

BOOK REVIEWS

Protestants: The Radicals who made the Modern World...

Christians in particular, to understand themselves and therefore make for a wiser church into the future. In the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation to read this book is to know that 'everything that is new is old again'.

Ryrie's definition of Protestant is; Protestants are Christians whose religion derives ultimately from Martin Luther's rebellion against the Catholic Church. They are a tree with many mangles branches but a single trunk.

This image of, I am the vine you are the (many) branches is maintained throughout the book. The primacy of the vine as being central to Protestant thought is captured in the myriad of circumstances in which the vine has taken root. The vine has engaged the church and the world because of a particular affair; "Protestants are lovers". From the beginning, a love affair with God has been at the heart of their faith", avers Ryrie. As with all love affairs it has been tumultuous as evidenced in the many examples given from as diverse places as Nicaragua, New England or Norway. It is a riveting story and Ryrie is comprehensive, astute and unstintingly fair, to the successes and failures alike.

Luther et al were not intending to modernize the world (and introduce shopping centres), but sought to save the world. In that uniquely Protestant aim, the Reformation introduced three elements that created or informed, from Luther to Walmart, which did indeed change the world.

Thus Ryrie's sub-heading, The faith that made the modern world. These three: free inquiry,

democracy and apoliticism are change benchmarks of the last five hundred years and are still alive today. Free inquiry has haunted and blessed Protestantism and still today the boundaries are provisional in matters of faith, doctrine and belief. Everything that's new is old again, - read the Basis of Union. "Democracy", the second contribution of Protestantism according to Ryrie, is fixed in conscience and woe-be-tide any establishment, religious or otherwise, that tries to stifle the urging of the Spirit within a lovers heart and mind. Thirdly, apoliticism; this somewhat hidden aspect of Protestant thought remains central to almost all the tangles branches. To continue the love affair, basically Protestant Christians, "want to be left alone" to live the Kingdom life. This position has paradoxically many political implications, the very (unintended?) outworking of the "Protestation".

Ryrie is excellent on the question of mood, feelings and the "taste" of faith, categories not often identified, but critical to the ordinary Christian life. Time and again these aspects emerge in the lives of lovers with staggering implications. If you can't get through the 470 pages, the last chapter on The Protestant Future will forewarn all of an evangelical heart, assuage anxiety and guide decision making into the future, whether reflecting on Luther or Walmart.

The book is a joy to read, very ironic, informative and comprehensive; the footnotes are a feast in themselves. A helpful glossary is included.

Rev'd Dr. Murray Earl is a UCA minister ACC member in South Australia

REFLECTION

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." (2 Corinthians 1:8b-9).

There are times in our lives where we are given far more than we can handle. At these times we wonder why bad situations seem to 'pile on' one after the other. What is God doing?

Paul described a time where they were under pressure which was far greater than they could endure. The situation

was so dire that they were sure they would die. It seemed that hope had vanished. But God was still in control! Paul says God was bringing these seeming hopeless situations upon them so that they would stop relying on themselves and put their trust in Him.

He is the God who did the impossible: He raised Jesus from the dead. And He goes on doing miracles as He takes us 'to the end of ourselves', so that we are forced to trust in Him, and then He does the saving - all to His glory.

In our greatest hardships, God squeezes our self-reliance out of us that we might live in the victory of trusting Him. We can't save ourselves, but He is mighty to save.

Devotionals are provided by Rev. Derek Schiller (Minister of the Word at St George Uniting Church, Qld), and are available via an APP for iPhone or Android. Each day a new devotion is provided. You can download the APP from the St George or ACC Website.



THIS IS THE ACC

Featured resource: New online resources

Confessing School of Faith Launched

The 2017 ACC Conference was pleased to receive the report of the School of Faith and the 'soft' launch of the website and now the website is up and fully running with resources to help our members understand their faith and role in the confessing movement. The School of Faith was endorsed as a concept at the 2016 Conference and it is now a reality and will continue to grow and develop in the next year as video and teaching seminars are added through links to the ACC YouTube site: ConfessingChrist. We give thanks to God for the diligent work of many people providing material for the website and especially the co-ordinating task group under the leadership of Rev Anne Hibbard. This new venture will be a blessing and comes at a critical time of the life of the ACC. Please click and have a look:



Who we are

Within the Uniting Church context of a very broad range of theology and practice, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is a nationwide body of congregations and individuals whose vision is confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church.

Our goals include

- Encouraging the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's Basis of Union.
- Providing resources, seminars and conferences to build up believers, develop their gifts, and equip them for life, mission and works of service.
- Encouraging Christian believers in earnest prayer through our Prayer Network.
- Encouraging younger members of the Uniting Church in their faith and participation.
- Communicating about current events and issues through our website, our national magazine *ACCatalyst* and local newsletters.

The objectives of the ACC

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

- a) To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
 - i) upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church's faith and life;
 - ii) calling the Uniting Church to determine matters

of doctrine and ethics according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;

iii) calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:

iv) providing biblically-grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;

v) developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and

vi) establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

b) To undertake such religious, educational or other charitable activities which are incidental to the above objectives.

How to join us

Membership rates for supporting members:

- Concession (single or couple):
\$20.00 pa. (financial year basis)
- Full (single or couples):
\$40.00 p.a. (*see website*)

● Contact (02) 9550 5358.

● Email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com

● Post: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

FILM



The Nativity Story



It's a Wonderful Life



Joyeux Noel



A Muppet Christmas Carol

Christmas Traditions

Christmas time can be a time for gatherings and there are many Christian films around to view and consider and some more secular ones that have Christian themes.

For a traditional telling of the real Christmas story, I recommend *The Nativity Story* (2006, PG). A wonderfully set and focussed production. I had an extensive review of this in an early ACCatalyst (December 2007 – 'The Meaning of Christmas in non-Christian times').

For a lateral and perhaps different take for the younger generation, but

one that can inspire considerable discussion, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1943, PG). If it was made in Victoria today, it would be a very short film as the main character would have been euthanised for depression, but fortunately you can still watch the gem of a performance from my favourite actor Jimmy Stewart as he re-lives the gift of life.

And *Joyeux Noel* (2006, M)

More of an adult film given some of the themes, this Oscar Winner for Best Foreign Film in 2006, about a truce at Christmas is a surprising,

but topical film given our continuing look at events during the centenary of World War I.

And if you have a good deal of time on your hands, how about A Christmas Carol? According to Wikipedia, there are 45 film versions of the classic Dickens book, with most critics and Christian film groups rating the 1951 version the highest, though I believe *A Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992, G) provides a worthy and lateral competitor, and one that the whole family can sing along too.

Peter Bentley

Battle of the Sexes



I thought it would be helpful to provide a comment on this film, though I caution potential viewers as there is portrayal of active same-sex relationships. **Note that the film received a PG rating; a sign of the times!**

For those who are unfamiliar, it is mainly a dramatic re-telling of the off-court competition between tennis champions Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs (a No. 1 player in the 1940s) and then their actual match. I was interested in this film because of the Margaret Court connection. Australian

actress Jessica McNamee plays Margaret Court. The most intriguing aspect is the secondary story that involves Margaret Court, as she played the first 'battle of the sexes', the match in May 1973 that Bobby Riggs won 6-2, 6-1. Margaret continues as a character, but is primarily a foil for Billie Jean King.

Riggs continually taunted Billie Jean King with the idea of a major telecast deal, and a match was eventually arranged and held in September 1973. It was telecast with an estimated audience of 90 million, a

very large number for the day. Steve Carell as Bobby Riggs and Emma Stone as Billie Jean are simply amazing in their roles.

The film is certainly well made and a fascinating biopic of the 1970s and male and female relationships, but the obvious, though not unexpected aspect is that it is also a promotional film for same-sex relationships, and thus a revisionist interpretation that essentially mocks people in the era for being so narrow-minded. This is nowhere more evident in that the actual role that Margaret Court is assigned in the film is that of 'lesbian spotter', and her prime target depicted is Billie Jean King. It is a topical film given that Billie Jean King weighed in on the Margaret Court controversy over Margaret's comments on same-sex marriage this year.

Peter Bentley