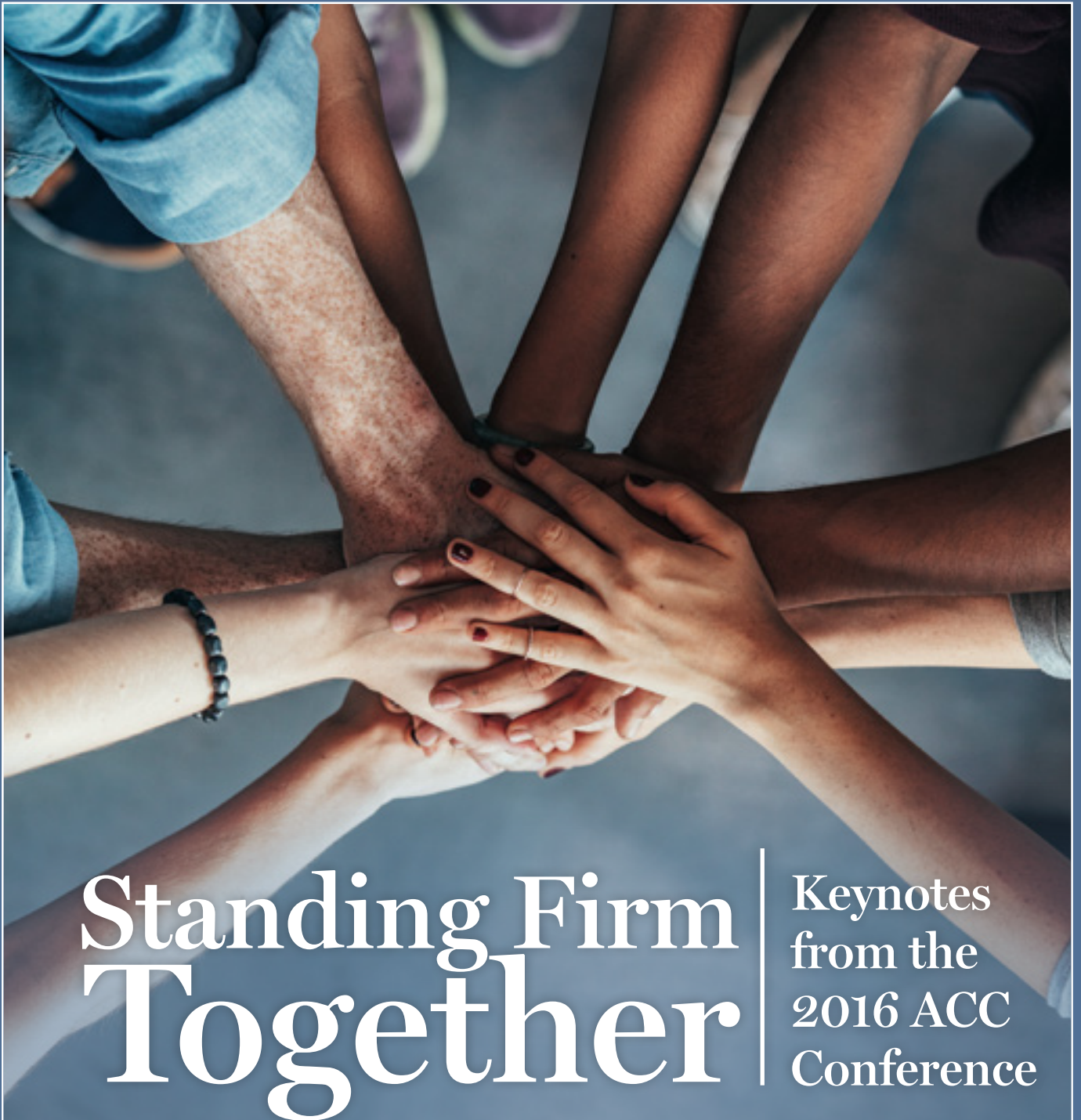


VOLUME 9 NUMBER 9 | March 2017

ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Standing Firm Together

Keynotes
from the
2016 ACC
Conference

Celebrating 200
years of the Bible
NEWS • 3

The Church's
Health Report
OPINION • 12

Uniting
without Care
BENTLEY REPORT • 20



Cover photo - iStockphotos

EDITORIAL

The Road Ahead



Thank you to those members who commented on our December 2016 magazine cover. I have a further comment on this and the wider context in my column The Bentley Report. It is a pleasure to also include two of the keynote papers from the 2016 ACC Conference in this edition. Please take time to read these papers. They are very encouraging and thought-provoking. We were very blessed with the speakers in Poatina, Tasmania, and as everyone attending has remarked, with the wonderful location and Christian hospitality. I know many people at ACC 2016 are looking forward to ACC 2017. This will be held in a regional area - Townsville and we will be blessed to be hosted by an ACC member congregation: Mount Louisa House of Praise. Please consider now planning to attend or to help a member from your congregation attend.

Peace and grace,
Peter Bentley

Note: in the September 2016 edition of ACC Catalyst, in the article about the Uniting Women Conference (page 4), the photo reference should read: Rev. Amel Manyon, the minister of the UCA Northern Suburbs Dinka Speaking Faith Community (Adelaide).

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Executive Editor: Max Champion
Managing Editor: Peter Bentley
Consulting Editor: John Sandeman

Office: 2 Erskineville Rd, Newtown NSW 02 9550 5358
Email for ACC Catalyst:
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Gone by Robyn Painter

Pastor, Peterborough Uniting Church

Earlier this week I had a meeting in Booleroo, so I decided to go and see how my old house was doing. I hadn't been back there for a few months, and no one has lived there since I left.

I was curious to see if anything was still alive in my garden. I had worked hard out there, and two years ago I had lots of nice things growing, and every morning I would hurry out to see which plants were flowering. Now, of course nothing gets watered, but I was hopeful that something was still alive.

However, when I drove up, I could see the wool on the bottom of the fence where the sheep had been getting through into the garden, and also the places where rabbits had been digging there.

Between the lack of water, the rabbits and the sheep they had got everything. There was nothing left of my garden. The roses were bare sticks, the tough fat-leaved plants had become sheep food. My beautiful, robust red day lily had been chewed off at ground level. There was dry grass, and a few weeds, but that was that. All of my hours of toil had been in vain.

I drove off feeling a little sad. Sad - yet not devastated. After all, it was God that called me to leave behind my little house and serve him in Peterborough, and serving God was more important than a garden. From an eternal perspective, it's a small price to pay.

I was reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,

where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Nothing on earth is guaranteed to last forever. Gardens die, wealth disappears, even our bodies fail. If this world was all we had to put our hope in, then our hope could easily be lost.

But we have a hope that is sure and certain and extends far beyond this fragile world - our hope in God. If we make him our aim - if he becomes our greatest love and passion, he will never be taken away from us - not ever!



Hilary Sandeman

ACC NEWS

Many ACC readers may have seen the webcast, or even participated in person at the Bible Society's Bicentennial Worship Service and event on Sunday March 5th : A Celebration of Biblical Proportions", and there are many reasons to celebrate and give thanks.



BIBLE SOCIETY

1817-2017

Australia's longest living organisation may not be what you think it is. It's not Houghton Wines or Westpac or the Australian Agricultural Company and it's certainly not McDonalds. There wasn't a Big Mac in sight when community leaders Governor and Lady Macquarie created the Bible Society in Australia 200 years ago.

Originally known as the British and Foreign Bible Society, the first branch in the Pacific region was approved by Governor Macquarie on March 7th 1817, officially launching the work of Bible Society in Australia.

In this, its Bicentenary year, the Bible Society remains the oldest continually operating organisation in our nation's history. The only change is the name. Constituent (state) bodies followed before they merged into a single organisation in 2010,



becoming Bible Society Australia (BSA).

It's still involved in the translation, publishing, and distribution of the Bible. BSA also aims to engage people with what it calls the Good Book, using both traditional and the latest media.

Bible Society Australia CEO Greg Clarke says "we're not content simply to hand out Bibles. We want to help people engage with the Bible and answer their questions about it. We're celebrating our 200 years of sharing the Bible by doing more of what supporters want us to do – championing the Bible worldwide, from prisons in Australia to churches in China".

In our increasingly secular society, the Bible remains the world's best-selling book with more than five billion copies printed.

Many of our national values stem from the Bible. A common ANZAC statement is from John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this – to lay down one's life for one's friends".

Dr Clarke says the work of Bible Society will continue both here and throughout the world, adding "the Good Book really is here for good".

See what is happening in your area:



<http://bicentenary.biblesociety.org.au/>

John Pearson works for Bible Society Australia.

"We want to help people engage with the Bible" - Dr Greg Clarke

Crosslight

Crosslight (Victorian and Tasmanian Synod newspaper) featured an extensive report on the 2016 ACC Conference in its December 2016 edition. Communications Manager Nigel Tapp is based in Tasmania and visited the conference to see first-hand an ACC gathering and also interview the ACC Chair and other members. Excerpts are included below and the full text can be found on-line at:



<http://crosslight.org.au/2016/12/04/core-beliefs/>

"The strength of opposition to any recognition of same sex marriage was conveyed to senior leadership of the Uniting Church of Australia at the annual conference of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC) in Tasmania last month. ... They were joined during the second day by the President of the Uniting Church, Stuart McMillan, and representatives of the Assembly Doctrine Working Group. Mr McMillan was the first UCA president to attend a national conference of the ACC, which was formed in opposition to the 2006 National Assembly's decision to re-affirm its position allowing congregations to install gay clergy.

Speaking after the conference, ACC national chair Dr Hedley Fihaki said the group had a mission to fulfil within the Uniting Church, which was keeping it faithful to Scripture and the foundational Basis of Union document. ...

On its website the ACC states that it exists to confess the apostolic faith, as outlined in Scripture, and oppose church teachings and practices that depart from this understanding. Those teachings or beliefs are labelled as heresy and to condone or promote them is an act of apostasy. The confessing movement – those who believe churches are deviating from core doctrines and need to be called back to them – is international and ecumenical. ...

Although the Senate's blocking of the same sex marriage plebiscite may have quietened national debate, the ACC is well aware it's an issue the Church will continue to face. The group is steadfast and ready with the conference approving a declaration on marriage and family to be given to Assembly."

DEVOTION

Prayer: Learning Life-long Discipleship

A prayer for use after reflecting on John 1: 29-42
and Matthew 4: 12-23.

Lord you know my present
circumstances,
my role and vocation in life.
As a full-time carer, student
or retired person ...
living in a fast-moving
world, I want to follow you.
I want to discern what it
means
to be your disciple in the
21st century
and to follow you through
2017.

I lay my plans, ambitions or
vocation before you.
Like the disciples who heard
your call
make me ready to let go of
the
nets and boats in my life,
the securities and
distracting pre-occupations
that crowd in on me.
Make me open to your
special call
to change my priorities.

In the year ahead, I want to
be your
un-distracted learner so

that my thinking
and everyday life-style
choices, more accurately
reflect your presence in my
life.

Amid a time of complicated
rapid change,
help me to follow you more
clearly

so that I know what to
embrace with gratitude
and what to resist with
courage.

Above all, change wrong
attitudes so that my
understanding
of other people grows and
matures.

By the Holy Spirit make me
your partner and associate
in being a 'fisher of people'.
Open doors of opportunity
to serve others
and to share the difference
you have made in my life
so that other people may be
drawn to you and into your
eternal kingdom now and
for ever.

AMEN

*Rev. E. A. Curnow maintains an active writing
ministry as an ACC member in Victoria.*

OBITUARY

*Dave McDonald
provided a wonderful
reflection on Howard
Bradbury on his website
Macarisms.com (12th
December 2016). This
is included below as
a tribute to Howard
and the faithfulness of
God. Many RA and
ACC members would
be aware of Howard's
strategic work in the
period 2003-2006,
collating statistics and
providing information
about the impact on
UCA membership of the
liberal decisions of the
2003 UCA Assembly.
We join with David in
giving thanks for the life
of Howard and pray for
Ruth and family.*

It was my honour and
privilege to speak at the
thanksgiving service for
Howard Bradbury at
the Australian National
University (held on 10th
December 2016). I first
met Dr Bradbury (as I
knew him then) early in 1975 when
we moved to Canberra. I last met
Howard (as I've known him for some
time) at the ICU at National Capital
Private Hospital only days before he
died. Our lives have connected in so
many ways over so many years, and
I truly thank God for our friendship
and his lasting influence upon me.

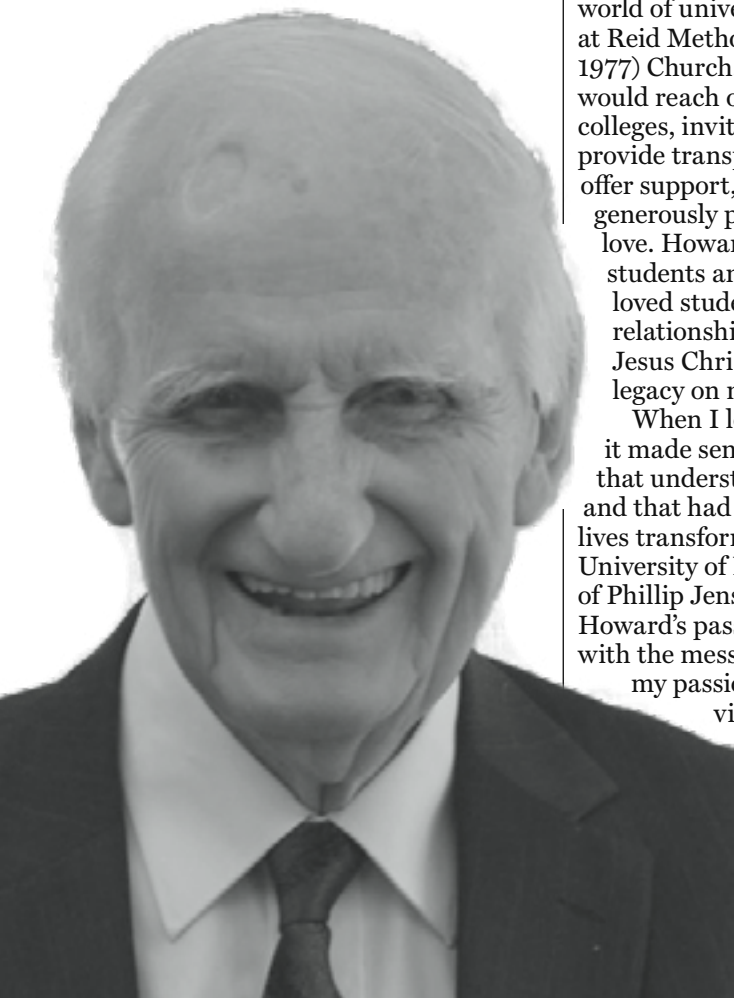
Dr Bradbury completed a PhD in
polymer chemistry at Birmingham
University in record time. After a
postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard
University, and working at CSIRO
Wool Research Laboratories, he
joined the Chemistry Department

Dr James Howard Bradbury (AM)

7 September 1927 - 28 November 2016

at the ANU in 1961. He has pursued sabbatical research at Cornell and Oxford Universities. He has been awarded a DSc from both Melbourne University and ANU. He received the David Syme Research Prize from Melbourne University and the Rennie Memorial Medal and H G Smith Memorial Medal from the Royal Australian Chemical Institute. In 2007 he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for his contributions.

The Director of the ANU Research School of Chemistry, Professor John Carver, was Professor Bradbury's PhD student and friend. He spoke highly at the thanksgiving service about Dr Bradbury's lasting impact in the lives of so many people—both academically and personally. Dr Bradbury was a scientists' scientist. And yet, I knew next to nothing of this influence prior to his passing.



I've been aware for some time of Dr Bradbury's extraordinary commitment to using his science for humanitarian good. He retired from his salaried position at the ANU at the early age of 61 so that he could devote himself more fully to exploring the chemistry of food and providing solutions to the plight of the poorest people in the world. He continued this brilliant work, unpaid for another 28 years, inventing and producing simple and affordable techniques to remove cyanide from cassava. Thousands and thousands have been rescued from the debilitating paralysis of konzo. It was deeply moving at the thanksgiving service to be reminded of the generous humanitarian impact of his work.

Yet my experience of the impact of Howard Bradbury, together with Ruth—his wife of 64 years—began with their hospitality. As a young teenager I was welcomed into the world of university student ministry at Reid Methodist (Uniting from 1977) Church. Howard and Ruth would reach out to students in the colleges, invite them into their home, provide transport, cook meals, offer support, encourage fun, and generously pour out Christian love. Howard and Ruth loved students and, even more, they loved students to enter into a real relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And this has left its legacy on me.

When I left home for university it made sense to seek out a church that understood university students and that had a passion to see their lives transformed. This I found at the University of NSW with the ministry of Phillip Jensen and St Matthias. Howard's passion to impact students with the message of Jesus became my passion. I pursued this with

vigour and eventually moved back to the place where I had seen it first—the ANU—where I started the ministry of FOCUS and later Crossroads Christian Church.

Howard and Ruth

supported Fiona and me as we began this new work in Canberra. They would ask us how we were going and pray for us. Howard joined the committee to support the university ministry and, together with Ken Mackay, opened up many doors for ministry on the campus.

Over the last decade or more of Howard's life our friendship has been enriched in new ways. Being unimpressed with the compromise of the Uniting Church on some matters of biblical importance, Howard led the planting of a new church called the Canberra Christian Fellowship (in the Methodist Tradition). I regularly provided preaching support to this group who were led with wisdom, grace and love by Howard and Ruth. Each time I would join with this fellowship I would come away encouraged to keep on going myself.

Howard Bradbury was a man of science, esteemed across the globe. He was a man of the people, loved by his wife, children, grandchildren, and 20 great grandchildren. His love for people shaped his application of his science to the needs of others. But deeper still, Howard was a man of faith in God through Jesus Christ. His knowledge of God laid a solid foundation for his scientific passion. The mercy and kindness of his Saviour pushed him to love, respect, and invest in people.

At a time when it is normal to view Science in opposition to Christianity and reason as the antithesis of faith, Howard causes us to pause and reconsider. Here was a man whose faith was founded on good reasons. Jesus Christ, who died and was buried, was raised and appeared to eye-witnesses, who testified to what they saw. These events in history transformed Emeritus Professor James Howard Bradbury AM, PhD (Birmingham), DSc (Melbourne), DSc (ANU), to apply his immense scientific brain to consider the claims and promises of God.

Will you do the same?

Dave McDonald is now the National Director of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC).



PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

Fake news and Alternative Facts in a Post-truth age

After the U.S. Presidential election Bill Clinton accused Donald Trump of exploiting a 'post truth era where facts don't matter': Trump responded to unflattering news reports by labelling them 'fake news.' A Trump aide met inconvenient criticism by claiming to be relying on 'alternative facts'.

The hypocrisy is breathtaking. Two world figures accustomed to acquiring power by manipulating public opinion and masking unsavoury behaviour, parading themselves as paragons of truth and reality? Neither is a seeker after truth, but a spruiker of convenient truths to support their political and personal ambitions.

It's not that 'truth' has vanished from public view. However, it no longer refers to anything definitive, ultimate or universal, but to opinions and beliefs which satisfy our personal and collective egos and exploit our emotional vulnerabilities. Truth is so enslaved to sentiment that it cannot function as a criterion to sift the real from the fake, the genuine from the false.

This profound shift has not led to greater tolerance of others' beliefs and feelings. Our impulses, desires and wills are now massaged for commercial, political and ideological advantage. For example, our age is passionately committed to right causes against which one hesitates to speak on pain of causing offence

or precipitating social ostracism and even legal penalty.

The terms 'post truth' and 'fake news' are recent. But the situations they describe are not. Politicians and opinion-shapers have always masked their agenda behind declarations of truth. Now, though, Western democracies are rejecting Grand Narratives, like Judeo-Christianity and Enlightened Humanism, which claim to represent the truth about humanity and the world.

Their respective claims are both collapsing. Old debates have fallen silent. Neither is thought to hold the key to truth. Suspicious of truth claims used to mask the lust for power, we no longer hold out hope that John Lennon's 1971 heartfelt plea, 'All I want is the truth; just gimme some truth', will be heard.

How have we reached this

point? The late 19th century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche said that truth 'is merely a collection of images which are really illusions of which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.'

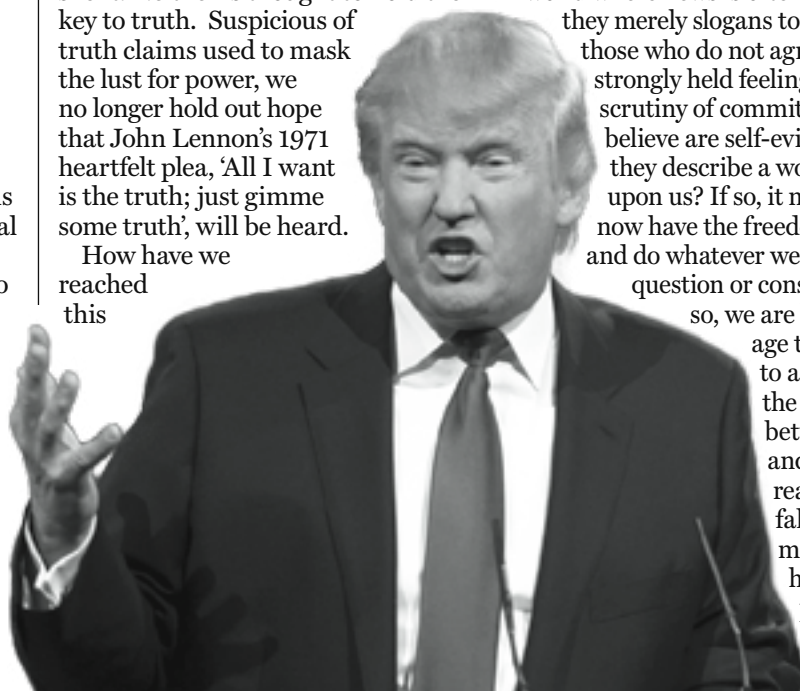
The post-truth generation has drawn the logical conclusion. 'Truth' is only the name we give our own strongly held beliefs, the implementation of which relies solely on techniques of persuasion. Power and influence now eclipse reason and faith as means to satisfy our desires and establish public authority.

As George Orwell's novel *1984* illustrates, this is best achieved when the Ministry of Truth falsifies history and persecutes 'thought crimes'. He had in mind ways in which States and political parties achieve and maintain power. But his analysis also applies to media organisations, marketers, celebrities, religious leaders and other prominent opinion-shapers who cleverly 'fake the news' in order to promote their political views and intimidate dissenters.

This development is worrying. When lying, deception and misrepresentation are embedded in our minds by constant appeal to our feelings, they are more persuasive than truth-based opposition to popular causes or corporate misbehaviour. The rise of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram exacerbates the problem.

What sense can be made of the claim that we live in a 'post-truth' world where news is often 'fake'? Are they merely slogans to intimidate those who do not agree with our strongly held feelings and avoid scrutiny of commitments we believe are self-evident? Or do they describe a world that is upon us? If so, it means that we now have the freedom to believe and do whatever we like without question or consequence. If

so, we are living in an age that refuses to acknowledge the distinction between truth and falsehood, reality and fakery. It means that life has no greater purpose than to fulfil our desires,



needs and causes.

The now frequent use of 'fake news' and 'post truth' in public discourse is both disquieting and hopeful. Disquieting, because this use makes us sceptical. Is there anybody we can trust? Are our lives based on a lie? ... Hopeful, because it leaves the door ajar to tell Good News about the Truth in Christ, the One person in history in whom God's creative and redemptive purpose for humanity has been embodied.

In *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* Diogenes Allen responds to those who say they don't have religious needs. 'It's not a question of needs. I go to church because Christianity is true!' How many of us would give such an answer? Who of us would say that what God has done in Christ reveals the splendour of truth? We are more likely to say how our needs are met and our desires satisfied.

Of course, many in the 'post truth' world think the story of his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension is 'fake news'. For them it lacks credibility, authenticity and integrity. This is partly the fault of Christians. We often lack courage to tell the truth about Christ's remarkable defeat of sin, evil and death which is the sign of hope for everybody and the whole creation. Nevertheless, the church is called to declare that, in this event, flawed human beings have been reconciled to God and their neighbours.

In this setting the church faces a stern test of courage. As Bishop Lesslie Newbigin says in *Truth to Tell*: 'When the Church affirms the Gospel as public truth it is challenging the whole of society to wake out of the nightmare of subjectivism and relativism, to escape from the captivity of the self turned in upon itself, and to accept the calling which is addressed to every human being to seek, acknowledge and proclaim the truth.'

Nothing fake. Nothing false. Good news. Truth incarnate.

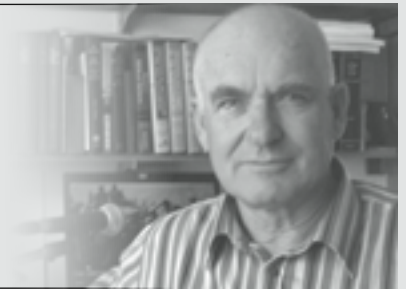
It should be the Church's fervent prayer that, in the 'post truth' world where news is often 'fake', or 'alternative facts', the authenticity of the Gospel will commend itself to powerful public figures, like Trump and Clinton, so that their policies and attitudes will reflect, however dimly, God's will for humanity perfectly imaged in Christ.

When they continue to pander to our desires, exploit our vulnerabilities, or twist the truth to their own malevolent ends, Christians must speak-out.

Paranoia and the Mercy of Hope

Ian
Clarkson

UCA Minister - South Australia



The Cambridge Dictionary editors declared that the word for 2016 was 'paranoid' defined as "Fears circling the brain searching for entrance into the rational faculties." Behind this perception is the Liar; the Deception, and the static of disbelief in the air. We must endure it by feeding on Scripture when our souls hunger for the better hope. We have a true home. Accept that this physical stage of life has a use by date. It's called death but it is a stingless death. You will never see it. God has decreed it, so let's go with it as necessary and good. Yes, the beginning and ending of the physical is usually messy, but it's soon done.

Our whole life span has been watched over by our Father-Creator, even before body and soul were knit together! All is well. He has brought us into His Son's being and nothing and no-one can snatch his child from him. Jesus is invisible now and into His realm we shall soon pass. It is Home. He is there. Actually it is all a lot closer than we imagine. Taking communion is his way of impressing us with this truth.

We have a right to be happy. A God given right to 'rejoice always'. Negativity and sorrow is a valley of darkness to prepare us for better heights of insight and service to each other and to make hope stronger. That's why He allows it. The purpose of this life is to learn the language of the country of our true citizenship. Holy love! Don't miss a chance!

We are ingrained with a sense of the future. There is much up ahead! Paradise the day, the second we leave this body. Let your imagination play with these revelational hints; Jesus will return with the numberless multitude of saints. Heaven and earth will be somehow renewed. The Holy City our home will come down to the restored earth. For a time heaven offers residency for the redeemed and will accommodate us better than we have ever known here. But our real destination is more. No beloved-one in heaven now would want to return to this earth, any more than they would want to hop back into the womb in pitch darkness. Neither can we grasp the future wonders any more than an enwombed baby can imagine the world of oceans, mountains and jet planes.

Paranoia gathers around the earth; from the Mahdi seeking Jihadists in the East to consumer obsessed secularists in the West. The future is the anguish of the ages. It besets the addiction crushed, and the spectrum phobias of many of our beloved children.

But hope is here. A new mind can be received, learned and practised and demons of paranoia eventually crushed. Amazing grace. Mine the Gospel to your advantage! Give in to nothing but Jesus and His counsel!

Standing Firm Together *in the Public Square*

Keynote Address to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations 2016 Conference

Wendy Francis

QLD State Officer - ACL



It's not that long ago in Australia's history when the Cross and the Australian flag were synonymous with Australia. We were known as the great southland of the Holy Spirit. Our nation's children went to Sunday school and we were comforted by the fact that our laws were based on Christian principles. We were proud of our Christian heritage.

But Christians no longer have that luxury. We can feel like strangers in our society, often ridiculed or even

despised in the media, as Christian values and beliefs are pushed to the margin. The shameful sexual abuse carried out, and at times covered up, by some who call themselves religious understandably contributed to this abandonment of any nominal adherence to faith.

The people of God have been in this position before. The prophet Jeremiah wrote to the Jews when they had been taken against their will to Babylon, by King Nebuchadnezzar. By the rivers of Babylon, as the song goes, they sat and wept when they remembered the "good old days". They bemoaned their fate and the feeling of isolation from the people they lived amongst. Many Christians today feel the same - "oh if only we could go back to how it used to be."

But the message the prophet Jeremiah gives to God's people does not pander to that feeling. Far from commiserating with them about their plight, he tells them, "this is what the Lord Almighty says: Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they



produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city, and pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." *Jeremiah 29*

Jeremiah tells God's people: don't fret about what you miss, get on with living now! Live! Marry and build houses. Settle down and have children. And not only that, God says you are to work for the good of the city where you are. Yes, that godless city. Work for its good. And, pray for the city. Because God's plans are for your good and not your harm. And not just your good, but the peace and prosperity of the city you now live in. The hope and future I have planned for you include your being in this city for its good and God's glory.

In the New Testament, Jesus tells his followers in Matthew 5:13-16 that they are to be salt and light. Salt and light never go unnoticed. Salt purifies, it flavours and it preserves goodness. And light illuminates and guides and brings great comfort.

One of my heroes is a man by the name of William Carey. Inspired to missions by reading the *Last Voyage of Captain Cook* he was committed to taking the good news of the gospel to India. But he believed the bringing of the Good News of the Gospel meant the delivery of the whole Truth, which brings freedom. He was committed to being salt and light and to the redemption of souls and of culture.

In his famous essay 'The Enquiry' Carey posed the question, "Are Christians under an obligation to help transform societies that live in intellectual, moral, social, political, and spiritual darkness?"

William Carey's name is still honoured in India long after he has gone. His legacy included major advances in health, education and literacy. At a time when women and children had very little status, he was largely responsible for stopping practices such as widow burning and infanticide.

But salt and light are not always welcomed. Salt stings if it comes into contact with an open wound, and the recipient recoils from it. And when light exposes evil there is immediate resistance.

I am the Queensland state director for the Australian Christian Lobby. I come up against resistance. But I believe God would have me "Keep calm and speak truth to power".

I love this famous photo (left) of the 'Tank man' who stopped a cavalcade of tanks threatening to run down protestors in Tiananmen Square. His stand stopped a potential massacre. One man made a statement and made a difference. I want to do the same.

And the way I believe God is calling me to do this is by speaking the Truth in love into the public square and into hearts and minds that He prepares. We find the injunction for us to speak truth in love in Ephesians 4:15 and 1 Corinthians 13:1. Truth matters. Tone also matters.

Unfortunately, our media can, too often, refuse to let truth get in the way of a good story.

Truth. One of the most profound questions in the Bible must surely be Pilate's question to Jesus when he spoke

to The Truth and asked, "What is truth?" He didn't realise that he was standing before the one who had the answers to every single question he could ever have.

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life.

And it is through his word that we will find his truth and that truth will set us free. Freedom. It is the deep cry of every human heart.

This word that is truth sets us free from bondage to everything that would trap us. And that same word calls those of us who know freedom to speak Truth into culture. Speak truth into every area of life that you can think of:

- Abortion
- Education
- Pornography
- Marriage
- Asylum seekers/Refugees
- Persecuted Christians
- Indigenous communities
- Homelessness/ poverty
- Mental illness
- Prostitution
- Trafficking
- Children in foster care

The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray speaks to this need to bring the values of God's kingdom into our earthly lives and struggles. He said to pray, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". I don't believe we can pray that prayer sincerely without being prepared to be involved in extolling His kingdom values here and now.

The opposite of the freedom-giving life of the kingdom of God is exemplified in the current culture of death being promoted throughout Australia. Euthanasia is currently being discussed in all State Parliaments apart from NSW.

The culture of death is perhaps most starkly represented by abortion. My home state of Qld has two abortion bills currently being considered in Parliament. Psalm 127:3 tells us that children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward. But, contrary to nature, women fight for the right to kill their unborn children. Women have been sold a lie. The slogan, "my body, my choice" is convenient for society because it then makes it "my problem".

Some statistics to consider -

- Australia has around 100,000 abortions each year.
- 1 in 4 Australian women will have an abortion.
- In Qld last year 27 babies survived abortion but were denied life-saving care, despite babies of the same gestation being cared for in the same hospital - the only difference was whether they were wanted or not.
- Recent late-term abortion statistics released in Victoria include the terrible statistic of a baby aborted at 37 weeks for 'psychosocial reasons'.

So we march. We sign petitions and we speak to our parliamentarians and we write letters. Because God implores us to choose life. Pro-life MPs bravely stand with the marchers and also speak out on this issue of life and death.

continued over...

Standing Firm Together in the Public Square...



hairdresser's approach in what the Brisbane Times which they published on June 3, 2011 "I went on to the (*Wendy Francis is homophobic*) website and said I am actually Wendy's hair stylist and I can let you know that if she was homophobic she definitely would not be coming to me," Mr Vaessen says. "I have known her for about seven years and we have great conversations about things. I am also a gay dad. I have a child with a gay girlfriend of mine. We talk about all these things and she would be one of the most open-minded people that I know. She and her husband - who is the pastor at the big Baptist church on Wickham Terrace - I mean they really are quite amazing people."

Some of my most impactful

conversations have been with survivors of prostitution. These brave women speak on behalf of others about the evils of this trade so that others can be saved. When Amnesty International supported the legalisation of prostitution worldwide this year, I stood with survivors outside the Amnesty headquarters in Brisbane to protest against their support of the practice of prostitution, not the oldest profession, but rather the oldest oppression.

We are surrounded by people in vulnerable situations and unless we listen we will not hear and we will be powerless to help. As a child, my family prayed that people all around the world would come to hear and understand the freedom of the gospel. It is a privilege then, to visit with people who are here in our land after fleeing some of the very countries that we prayed for.

But it is the children who are caught up in an adult world that affect my heart most of all. My husband and I have 10 grandchildren and I would do anything to protect them. Likewise I believe that as a society and particularly as a child of God, we have a responsibility to each and every child. News such as that of the pornography ring targeting Australian school girls which surfaced recently are an indictment on us as a society. In the area of internet safety, we are letting our children down in spectacular fashion.

This is why the Australian Christian Lobby continues to advocate for clean feed technology such as the UK have adopted. We will not give up on this.

Unfortunately, and to Australia's great shame, sexualisation occurs not only in our advertising and on our devices, but also in our classrooms in a deliberate fashion. The Building Respectful Relationships course, originating in Victoria and now in other States, asks children as young as 12 to write their own 'personal ad' with examples based on personal classifieds.

In this same program, 12 year old children participate in a role playing exercise. A small group of children are chosen from the class to sit on chairs in front of the class and adopt a character, wearing a hat with that character's name etc. They are given time to 'get into character'.

Can someone please tell me, how does a 12 year old girl 'get into character' of Megan, who *'has had 15 sexual*

My campaign for making outdoor advertising G-rated which has been running for 6 years now. The innocence of our children should be non-negotiable. Around Australia we are seeing encouraging movement to remove inappropriate advertising from our public spaces. Qld is introducing legislation which will allow the State government to deregister vehicles with offensive messages such as those on Wicked Campers. Victoria and Tasmania have followed this move and have added more comprehensive wording to include other forms of objectifying advertising.

But these changes don't come without opposition. Because of my stand for advertising in public spaces to be acceptable for children's viewing, I have become a target for hate and ridicule. A spoof play was performed in Canberra and I was one of the characters. I didn't attend.

One of the wonderful attributes of being Australian has been our ability to have an opinion and to discuss it openly, with respect. This freedom is rapidly vanishing. Tolerance is demanded, but you are not tolerated if you disagree with the popular, media-driven, agenda. This sin against popularism will most likely see you vilified publicly.

I have come to understand well, that those who oppose my right to express my views look at life from a very different world view from my own.

One example of this was a time when a young man in Brisbane made some very derogatory comments about my character on social media. They were unsolicited and unfair. I had never met him before but was made aware of his rant, and so I contacted him, and we met up for coffee. It was a great opportunity for both of us to understand the other's viewpoint. This young man later wrote an article about our meeting. Whilst he still disagreed with my position, it was a respectful article and his final sentence read, "I won't deny it was one of the most surprising coffee dates I've had in a long time".

Other attempts at civil conversation don't always go so well, such as the time I campaigned against condom ads in school bus shelters. The photo-shopped image that was circulated on social media of me with a red condom stuffed in my mouth was an obvious attempt to shut me up.

Following on from that attack, I was delighted by my

partners and describes herself as Bisexual? Megan has had casual sex and some short term partners, including two women. She rarely practices safe sex. She forgets to protect herself because she is often drunk when she has sex.

Introducing adult concepts to children is usually considered to be child abuse. But our governments promote the introduction of adult concepts to children as essential education. Shame on us. Shame.

Earlier this year in Qld, one school principal made a complaint about Religious Instruction. A full inquiry was held. Religious Instruction won. Thank God.

Also this year, over 13,000 Queenslanders signed a petition calling for an inquiry into the deceptively-named 'Safe Schools' program. But the 13,000 have been ignored.

The Safe Schools program for 11-14 year old children addresses questions such as "What does it mean to be bisexual?" And the very confusing answer that is given is, "Not worrying about who I want to like and so forth. It's just meeting a person and being able to say, you're really nice to me and I like you." Source: Safe Schools "All of Us" video for 11-14 year olds.

The Safe Schools program is promoted as a resource for children 4+ years old called 'The Gender Fairy'. In this picture book, 4 year old children are told, "Only you know if you are a boy or a girl. No-one can tell you".

The child in the book born biologically female is depicted as being angry because she wishes she could get out and play soccer. The child born biologically male is crying because he wants to be a girl and dance.

The stereotyping in this book is outrageous, as is the confusing message to infants. Is it any wonder, that all around our country we find children as young as 3 thinking they might want to change their gender?

This year we have found that referrals to The Children's Hospital at Westmead for gender services have tripled, with one doctor saying they had "escalated rapidly" across every State. In another major children's hospital in NSW, 250 children, some as young as three, are being assisted by the gender dysphoria unit. Eminent Psychologists question and warn but appear to be ignored.

In a recent interview, NSW Education Department Deputy Secretary of School Operations, Gregory Prior, told how a school in that State used Safe Schools resources to help teachers assist a 4-year old to transition genders.

A young 15 year old Australian girl recently had irreversible surgery to remove her breasts because she wants to be male. We have done this young person a terrible disservice. And at 15 she needed love, support and guidance. Not surgery.

The current debate over the meaning of marriage in our nation is part of this gender confusion. The de-gendering of marriage goes hand in hand with the de-gendering of our education, of our birth certificates, of adoption, of our toilets and to reject this push makes one a target of the political correct media and the Marxists and the elites who want to decide what is best for us all.

But marriage matters. This is why the Australian Christian Lobby, along with many other groups - Christian, other faiths and secular - continue to call for a people's vote on this most basic societal building block.

For a Christian, marriage is a picture of Christ and his bride, the church. For secular commentators the threat to freedom of belief and conscience, one of our most basic freedoms, is very real and very concerning. We have already seen serious repercussions from the push for same-sex marriage on the right to freedom of speech, both here in Australia and around the world. For outlining in a booklet the Catholic position on marriage, which coincidentally mirrors our current laws in Australia, to parents of children at Catholic schools in Tasmania, Bishop Julian Porteous was taken before the state anti-discrimination tribunal.

If a business dares to support organisations which publicly support marriage as being between one man and one woman, they can expect their business to be targeted by hate and an attempt to bring them down. Or lose a position.

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Left: Wendy Francis presents Marriage Matters

Standing Firm Together in the Public Square...

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STATE POLITICS

Queensland Labor acts against Christian schools program



Education Minister Kate Jones ordered the review after a complaint by one principal. Picture: Darren England.

The Australian | 12:00AM June 8, 2016

274     Save

Article from *The Australian* June 8, 2016

A meeting organised for church and community leaders to discuss the campaign for retaining the current definition of marriage in the lead up to a plebiscite on marriage was targeted with such venom that the hotel where the meeting was being held, felt compelled to cancel the booking because of fears for the safety of their staff.

This is the new tolerant Australia!

We have already seen the consequences in education. The most precious and honoured roles of fatherhood and motherhood are being made redundant, unnecessary and irrelevant in the push for the acceptance of same sex parenting.

Those who want to change the definition of marriage are calling for a parliamentary vote to decide the issue. This is despite more than 20 parliamentary votes already being held and lost, and despite bipartisan unanimous acceptance of the current definition of marriage just a decade ago, and despite the Greens party promoting a bill for a national plebiscite just a year ago.

In the book of Judges, there is an awful, horrible, story of abuse towards a woman from one who was meant to be her protector. It ends with a scene that belongs in the worst horror movie you can imagine. I avoid reading this story. It's just too awful. But I am currently reading through the Bible using a phone app to track my progress. And this chapter came up. So I read it, and was once again horrified by the capacity of humanity to commit evil against their fellow human beings. But what struck me powerfully as I read it this time was the call to action and response in *Judges 19:30*. God's people, stunned by the horror of what had occurred, said to each other - "Think about it! What are we going to do? Who's going to speak up?"

The question burned in my own heart. My response with God's enabling is, "Here am I Lord, send me".

This is not just a reactive fight against evil; it is a proactive fight for our children's right to their innocence. God highly values children. He tells us that unless we come to him as children we will never enter the kingdom of

heaven. Is it any wonder that Satan would want to destroy childhood?

Wanting to equip my own grandchildren and the children of our nation I developed a resource to help children know what to do when they are confronted by images or messages or speech that they instinctively know is not good.

I would propose that it's a good and important message for each one of us, no matter our age. God tells us where he wants our minds to linger in *Philippians 4:8* - "Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things."

As children of God, we are called to be salt and light in this world. Both are good things that sometimes cause aggravation. But we are called to be salt and light regardless. Always remembering that God says truth without love is like a sounding gong. Hard to hear. You want to block your ears from this sort of sound.

What God requires is Truth. In love. And His truth requires action.

We can be part of God's plan of redemption. Of souls and of culture. Girls, if you see an offending magazine or advertisement in newsagents, shopping centres or service stations, pick it up, and turn it around. You are making a small but significant two-fold statement - you are sick of being objectified and you want to protect children.

In conclusion, there is much to occupy our prayers and our activity. But I remind us all, especially myself, that while we are engaged in battles for what is true and right and good, and sometimes those battles are won and sometimes, in God's wisdom and plan, battles are lost, God has already won the war.

What he calls us to is boldness in the calling and the purpose that he has for your life. May God help us all to be faithful to that calling.

**Wendy Francis is the
Queensland State Officer for the
Australian Christian Lobby**



Tasmanian ACC Group
planning the conference meeting 11 April 2016



The unbeatable view from the cafe
Poatina (2016)

More memories from 2016 ACC Conference



ACC at Community Hall



Inside the cafe
Poatina (2016)



Another view from the cafe
Poatina (2016)



Archbishop Porteous addresses ACC Conference
(see page 16 for his Keynote Address)

Are We Sick or Healthy?

We need to get this right from the outset: the health or sickness of the church is ultimately the work of God. Some would say the mere existence of the church is decisive proof that the Living Christ is in the midst of His people.

The church has encountered all sorts of storms through the centuries yet God still uses imperfect people in various states of spiritual health to accomplish His purposes. Pastor Rick Warren says, “Forget about church growth, aim for church health.”

Just as a healthy person gives attention to diet, exercise and rest to maintain vitality, so there are principles that God honours when it comes to the health of the church. The National Church Life Survey suggests that today **faith, worship and belonging** are key qualities and indicators of both the commitment and confidence of church attendees. Some prefer to place more emphasis on service and the church serving in the community, because it is thought to be more helpful than evangelism for attracting new members. Last November Uniting Financial Services sponsored a “Healthy Churches Expo” in NSW. In that positive initiative, it would be interesting to gauge how central faith, worship and belonging were regarded as priorities. Marvin Owen a church health strategist lists 25 key characteristics of a healthy church. He places Spirituality first. This is where the church seeks to know and follow God’s will. They

never lose sight of the fact that they are His people, and that it is His power and His purpose and plan. Owen points to other major categories as being Personal vitality, Relational vitality and Missional vitality.

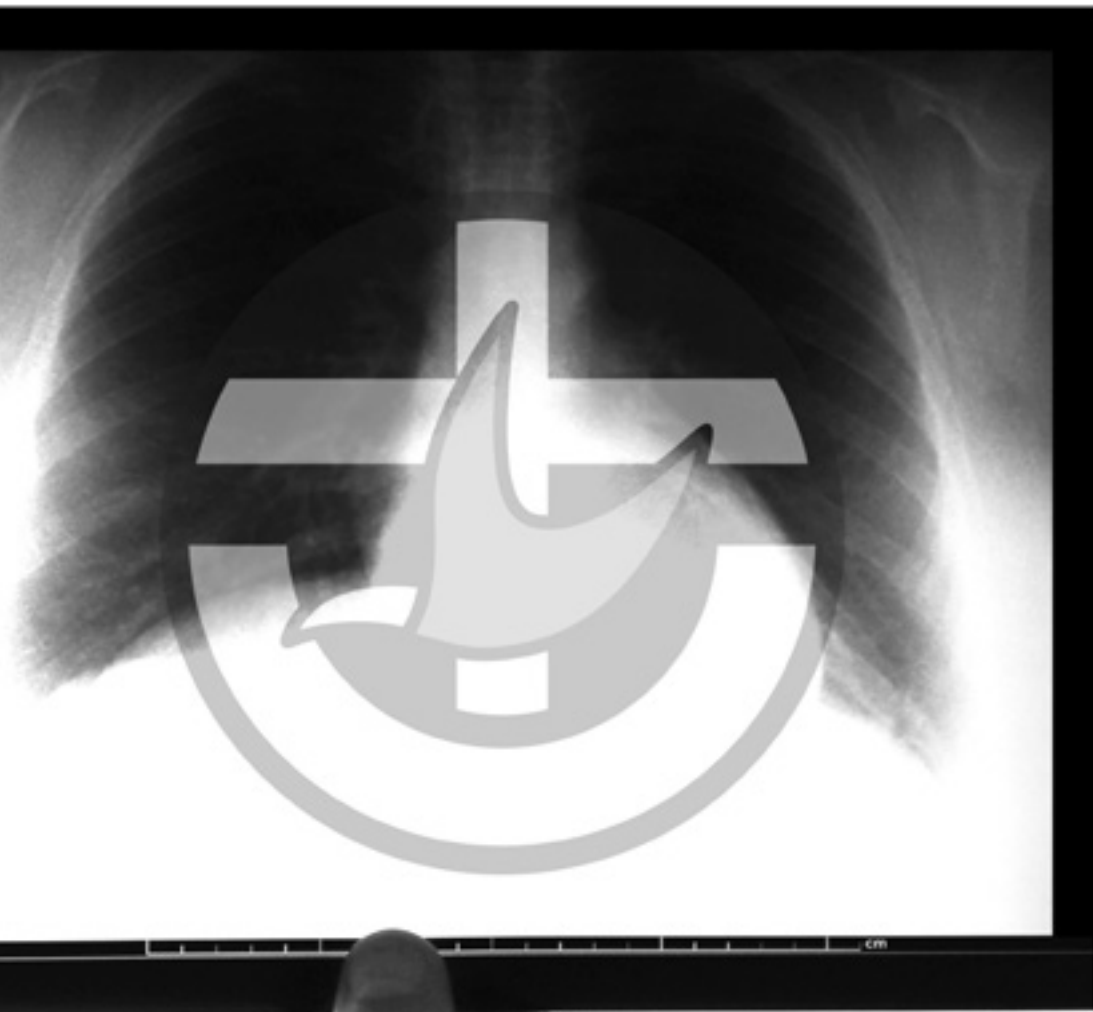
The Port Philip East Presbytery is one of the largest Presbyteries in Victoria. Recently one of its committees concluded that “the post-war model of church just isn’t working.” While it seems to have taken a long time for the committee to reach this conclusion, it is encouraging that some are concerned about the continuing health of the church. The Presbytery report says that after reviewing the financial returns of congregations it is estimated that of about 70 congregations fewer than 10 can support a full-time minister from their offerings. “Another 6-8 are struggling to do so, and probably won’t be able to do so in the next few years. Another 6-8 have large property or investment income so can maintain full-time ministry, but have few members to maintain the life of their congregation.”

The Mission Development Committee of the Presbytery says, “We see much evidence of exhaustion and lack of hope among

members, leaders and ministers of our congregations, as they seek to maintain the structures, the buildings and finances of an outmoded model of church. Looking for part-time ministry to do what is clearly failing is not the answer. --- We now live in a more secular society, which distrusts organisations, especially religious institutions and yet this is where people long for meaning, community and spirituality.”

Generally, the Uniting Church regards itself as being one of the most contemporary churches in the nation. There are many ready to speak in glowing terms of the church but the truth is that it is unhealthy and getting worse. Denial of the real symptoms of sickness is a huge problem in the Uniting Church. While the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is often marginalised by the majority because it confronts the church with the need for renewal, a conservative stance that upholds the historic faith of the church cannot afford to be conservative in practice. It also needs to be flexible, adaptable and open to discerning God’s new way forward.

At least the Port Philip East Presbytery Committee is attempting



to be brutally honest. Congregations need to be just as honest and most importantly honest before God. The Presbytery Committee however does not go far enough. It is not just a matter of new models for a new time. Today you can find a thousand different models and key characteristics of a healthy church on the internet, but the church's real health relates to how passionate or how confused it is about its message. It is a matter of how convinced it is about owning its message and core beliefs. In the attempt to be inclusive and relevant, sadly the church has lost its way and made itself irrelevant. Tom Frame in his book, "Losing my Religion" suggests that by 2030 those identifying as Christians in Australia will be found in four main groups:

Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Reformed and Orthodox. Churches that do not present an **alternative** to popular culture will disappear. *"Left-leaning', cause driven, liberal Protestant Churches that lack doctrinal rigour and are preoccupied with the promotion of social justice and cultural inclusion will be the first to go."* Frame says, *"Their place will be taken by secular advocacy groups with social policy expertise."*

Can the Uniting Church move from sickness to health? According to Davis McCaughey, only if it *"renews the faith by which she lives"* and boldly goes out on mission. Can a church in decline be a healthy church? I believe it can be if it is loyal to its Lord, loyal to the historic faith of the church and if its preaching and teaching honours the Scriptures rather than being a general social commentary. A healthy church may not have an ordained minister of the Word supported by the structures of yesterday but it will be a creative, warm community

inspired by the Holy Spirit that stands in stark contrast to the world around it. The Salvation Army and their Discipleship programme gets close to the mark when it says in addition to brutal honesty there needs to be real corporate confession and repentance. This will not come without cost and there will be many who protest, but as members of the Uniting Church we need to confess our plurality, our loss of faith, our lack of obedience and our selfish desire for our own comfort.

There are signs of hope as some young people give themselves to mainstream ministry in the space that the Uniting Church provides, but the church will only be healthy as it is empowered by a biblical vision and a passion inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Rev. E. A. (Ted) Curnow
See more of Ted's writings on
his section in the ACC website:
Practical and Pastoral

Standing Firm Together *in Time of Trial*

Keynote Address to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations 2016 Conference

The Most
Rev. **Julian
Porteous**
Catholic Archbishop of Hobart



I am very honoured to be asked to speak at this Conference. The theme of the conference is a most appropriate one at this moment in the life of the Christian Church in Australia – we need to stand firm together in Christ.

Growing Anti-Christian Sentiment

The Christian church is entering a new era in its history in Australia. It is entering an era where it is no longer seen as a respected presence in the society, but is viewed by many as an obstacle to the wellbeing of society. The Christian church is currently being forced more and more to retire within its own walls. There is a growing anti-Christian sentiment where the Christian churches are regarded as being out of touch with the realities of contemporary life, wedded to some bygone era.

The dominant view now is that humanity can and ought to finally throw off the remaining vestiges of the Christian religion and be liberated from its oppressive morality. With this humanity can finally realise its true destiny and greatness: the final emancipation from servitude to Christian morality.

Attempts are already well underway in the West to marginalise and limit the participation of Christians in the public square through the enactment of legislation that requires Christians to violate their consciences. In the US we have seen the calculated move by the Obama Administration to force particularly Catholic institutions to offer healthcare packages that pay for contraception and abortifacients. So too, here in Australia, State and

Commonwealth governments are beginning to introduce laws which are directly aimed at restricting the freedom of Christian organisations.

The 2013 (mis-named) Reproductive Health Act, not only legalised abortion in Tasmania but introduced a 150m exclusion zone around abortion clinics to prevent any form of what is referred to as “prohibited behaviour”, essentially what amounts to any form of counselling or protest. It is interesting to note that historically pro-life groups in Tasmania have not undertaken such actions outside abortion clinics. In other words, there was no need for such exclusion zones.

In doing so the Act attacked two of the most fundamental human rights, the right to freedom of assembly and the right to freedom of speech. The exclusion zone provision established a restriction on any form of public expression which in some way expresses disapproval of abortion outside an abortion clinic.

In addition this Act requires doctors who have a conscientious objection to abortion to provide women seeking abortions “with a list of prescribed health services from which the woman may seek advice, information or counselling on the full range of pregnancy services”. In other words, they have to refer her to services which offer abortion, violating their consciences.

Governments hostile to Christianity are more emboldened than ever to pass legislation which they know is incompatible with Christian beliefs and practices. One would expect this to escalate in the years ahead. We are confronted with a new era of legal persecution of Christians by the State. Along with this more recent direct attack on Christians we have witnessed the slower and longer-term effort to overthrow the Christian moral framework which has informed Western societies over the last millennium.

A period of intense social change Why has this occurred?

In the Western world we are witnessing the ascendancy of secular liberalism as the new cultural ideology. This secular liberalism has its origins in the Enlightenment. It has become a key influence in shaping Western society. In more recent times its principal vehicle has been the social

movement referred to as the Sexual Revolution.

Secular liberalism is an atheistic humanism which is based on a false anthropology. It views the human person as most fully human when separated from God. On this understanding the human person is held to be the final authority not only of morality but of existence itself.

The US Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy embodied this understanding when he claimed in the 1992 ruling of *Planned Parenthood versus Casey* that “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life...”.

The Church sees things very differently. The Catholic Church teaches that (quote) “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light”. (See *Gaudium et spes* #22) In other words, humanity is only fully revealed to itself in the person of Jesus Christ. The human cannot be fully grasped only in terms of the human; it requires the Divine to reveal its true nature. To understand the human we must look beyond the human to what is permanent and lasting, the Truth, which is Jesus Christ. It is only in this truth that man is revealed to himself.

“The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.”

Over the last fifty years in particular we have witnessed the rise of atheistic humanism in attempts, mostly successful, to redefine the dominant societal understanding of human sexuality, marriage and family. In a relatively short period of time we have witnessed an extraordinary shift in attitudes around human sexuality, which has resulted in legislative reform to enshrine the new social mores.

Arguably, the critical moment came when there was a widespread acceptance of contraception, which, sadly, many Christians embraced. This change fundamentally separated the procreative and unitive dimensions of human sexual relations. By providing the ability for couples to intentionally remove the generative dimension

from the sexual expression of their love, they allowed for the widespread acceptability of sex as an end in itself. Cohabiting couples, or in particular single women, could now engage in sexual intimacy without the worry of unwed pregnancy and the social stigma it attracted. The wholesale availability of contraceptives, especially the Pill, led to a profound change in societal attitudes towards sex.

Pope Paul VI in his 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, saw that once there was a means to separate the act of sexual intercourse from its life-giving dimension there would be a radical increase in promiscuity which he prophetically saw would result in the devaluing or sexual objectification of women.

Western society has witnessed a dramatic change in its attitudes towards sexuality. We have seen the moral acceptability of same-sex sexual relationships. Once laws prohibiting same-sex sexual expression were repealed, the “homosexual” lobby went on the offensive pushing for the legal equality of same-sex relationships with marriage and more recently legal redefinition of marriage to include same-sex relationships.

In all this there was one voice that consistently challenged these changes in society’s attitudes: it was the Christian church. Those who advocate sexual liberation in all its forms knew that there is one key focus of resistance. They knew that they had to nullify the influence of the Churches in the legislature and in public debate.

It was interesting to note that when Katy Faust was on Q&A, Tony Jones kept persisting with the question: “are you a Christian?” The implication was obvious, that if she was a Christian then her personal experience could be discounted. These days it is a liability to be a recognised Christian in public debate. A Christian is considered to be biased, bigoted and judgemental. Any Christian who expressed their views on matters of sexuality, marriage and family is considered to be guilty of “hate speech”.

Of course, one reason why Christians have always fallen foul of totalitarian regimes is that their ultimate allegiance is to a higher power, the Truth itself, who is God. This allegiance was a problem for the Romans who required citizens to worship the emperor. It was a problem in the USSR because believers would not give their ultimate allegiance to atheistic materialism. History has shown that Christians are the subject of

continued over...



Standing Firm Together in Time of Trial...

...persecution because, despite their willingness to be good citizens, they will always see themselves as pilgrims on this earth and know that their homeland is in heaven.

In an address to the Cardinal electors following the death of Pope John Paul II, the then Cardinal Ratzinger, used a term which aptly captures what is occurring in Western societies. He spoke of the "Dictatorship of Relativism". This phrase expresses something very important about the rise of relativism. Contrary to its own sloganeering that it is all about tolerance and diversity, relativism necessarily imposes its own controversial anthropology and morality, and will do so ruthlessly if given the chance.

It claims the right to be the only way of seeing reality. Any other view cannot be tolerated. It argues that the public square should be only open to thought and argument stripped of any reliance on religious belief or presupposition. It sees religion as a private matter which should not influence public debate. However, it is itself a "religion", if by religion we mean a worldview with an accompanying set of moral beliefs. Secular liberalism is a way of understanding human existence and it affirms certain moral positions. It is not a neutral position or a value-free zone.

The charge is often levelled at Christians that they are seeking to impose their morality on society. However, secular liberals are the ones imposing their views of human existence and their morality on others. Pope John Paul II answered this charge very well when he said that the Church seeks not to impose but rather to propose its views to society.

Secular liberalism seeks to eliminate any consideration of the Divine from human society. It proposes a freedom in matters sexual which is in fact simply licence to do whatever one wants. Pope John Paul II accurately spoke of the eclipse of God resulting in the eclipse of man. When God is removed from human life, humanity loses sight of itself; it cannot make sense of itself. Humanity enters a darkness. The light is taken away. What is lauded as a new freedom becomes a path to unhappiness and the breakdown of the quality of human life.

Pope Benedict XVI speaks of this situation as a "kind of amnesia which... is nonetheless a denial of the treasure of our faith, a denial that could lead to the loss of our deepest identity". Cultural forgetfulness is one of the great problems of our time. We forget that our society only exists as it does because of its Christian inheritance.

Without this heritage we cannot but return to the pagan dictum of power as the ultimate authority in human matters. If there is no objective truth, no Divine that transcends the human, then the final authority in human existence can only be the Nietzschean will to power, where the only absolute is the rule of the stronger will.

We are faced with a stark choice, the way of Christianity (which aspires to goodness, truth and beauty) or the way of nihilistic atheism where there is only the rule of the stronger. As Pope Benedict noted: "A freedom which is hostile or indifferent to God becomes self-negating and does not guarantee full respect for others".

Freedom of Religion

Christianity is, in fact, the true champion of human freedom. The idea of religious freedom itself is a fruit of the Christian view of life. Human freedom is of fundamental importance to the Christian. For at the very heart of God's nature is love which is only possible with freedom. Authentic love cannot be forced, it can only be the free intentional action of the individual.

Related to this issue is Christianity's elevation of human nature to be a reflection of the divine. For human beings are only able to love God because they have first been made in the image and likeness of the Divine. Fundamental to Christianity is the view that every human being has an essential dignity flowing from this creation in the *Imago Dei*.

A religious view of reality should be given respect in the public square. Public debate is best served by a vigorous honest interchange between rival positions, in the search for wisdom and truth. It is important that public debate is conducted in a robust but fair exchange. This brings us to the related point of referring to Christians as bigots simply for expressing their beliefs on a matter that concerns human sexuality or marriage. The use of inflammatory rhetoric, which in fact bears no relationship to the facts, can only

signal a degrading of social debate. Reason is replaced by emotion.

Currently the public debate on the question of the definition of marriage is more subject to vehement emotional reactions, rather than rational argument. This emphasis needs to change as we approach the plebiscite.

Christianity has offered and will continue to offer real social benefits in society. In the past Christianity was recognised and valued because it contributed to social wellbeing. It fostered higher moral standards through the promotion of a commitment to the life of virtue and self-sacrifice.

In the early settlement of Australia, for instance, there was a strong view that chaplains should be appointed to work with convicts, as it was recognised that such men could assist in the reformation of convicts. That is why the English government was willing to pay even Catholic priests to act as chaplains in Van Diemen's Land. Religion was seen as beneficial to the social order. Without the call of religious belief to more noble virtues, society is forced to rely upon law and regulation to achieve the just ordering of society. Christianity has made a great contribution to the social stability of Western societies.

Challenge to religious freedom

There is no doubt that Australian society is moving in a particular direction. The forces at work have been growing in strength and we will not be able to turn the tide in the short term. However, truth will have a way of coming to the fore, and freedom will not be trampled down for long. We should hold on to a belief that eventually things will change. Patterns of behaviour that are currently being promoted will be proven to be damaging. The bad fruits will become evident.

We are entering a new phase of Christian life. We will have to learn to live under various forms of persecution, but we will live as a people of hope. We will live as a people who know that God has been victorious in Jesus Christ. We will be purified and hopefully strengthened through this process. We will be readied to once again, to go forth with a message of truth, goodness and beauty which will triumph over the darkness that has descended on our beloved nation.

Emerging leaders award camp 2017

The fourth ELA Camp held at Adare Uniting Venue, Victor Harbor, in late January was again a wonderful experience for those young leaders selected by their churches to have four days of teaching, learning, experiencing, sharing, praying, singing and having fun together.

Coming from Mackay in Queensland, four from Sydney, two from Coromandel Valley, and from Waikerie, Port Augusta and Peterborough, the group quickly got to know one another and set a basis for close sharing and learning from one another as well as from the blessing of excellent speakers.

Sessions on "Joining Christ's Ministry", "Why would Jesus Want Me as a Leader?", "A Leader makes Leaders", "Growth Options for Church Leaders", "The Making of a Leader", "The Confessing Movement – vital for the UCA" and "Living as a Christian in a Secular World" from Andrew Klynsmith, Simon Dent, Mark Schultz and Rod James plus electives from Craig Bailey, Sam Chan, Isaac Moore/Kevin Marriott/Shirley James. Rod and Mark gave much food for thought, with teaching and testimony to God's faithfulness to those in leadership.

Interspersed with reflection times, small groups, activities, games and a talented and fun concert compered by Olivia, the four days were expertly led by Alumni of previous Camps: Ellen Burford (2013), Olivia Jaeschke (2015), Mercy Klynsmith (2015), Isaac Moore (2013), Kevin Marriott (2013) and James Ross-Naylor (2015). Other adult support included Jill Schunke (prayer), Mariska van de Loo (ACC National Council member



Left to right: James Ross-Naylor, Henry Olonga and Pastor Mark Schultz

and bookstall), Raylene and Brian Tugwell (kitchen assistance) and Jay and Alan Madsen (cooks) plus Mark Schultz and Rod and Shirley James. Well done to the organising team and Mark as convenor.

Worship in the Adare Church may not have had the beautiful backdrop experienced by those at former camps at Longwood (glass window looking over valley with trees), but how good it was to worship the Lord in music, song and prayer, gather at the Lord's table and hear the Word of God and testimony to Jesus' presence in the lives of his children.

How grand folk looked at the formal dinner as they were waited on, ate well, talked and listened to entertaining former Zimbabwean cricketer Henry Olonga (pictured above centre) share about his life in Zimbabwe, playing international cricket and now living in exile. He told of the ways Jesus has led him and continues to lead him and his family along this journey of life.

Verbal comments about the 4 days included "it reinforced it is not

our ministry - it is always Jesus' ministry", "don't make leaders like yourself - help others develop their ministry", "was a great openness to share in small groups - hear others' stories", "valued developing relationships, getting to know folk", "good to have young leaders and more experienced", "loved the dinner, getting dressed up and a great international speaker in Henry", "variety of speakers - different perspectives - in our weakness others can step up", "Faith and Culture elective helpful", "getting to know/ hear about others life and experience", "working out what sort of leader you are - liberating", "change of venue worked well and was great" and "sense of unity and peace".

So young people and congregations, the next ACC SA Emerging Leaders Award Camp will be January 2019! Don't miss out - start planning.

Shirley James is the Treasurer for ACC SA and ACC Board of Management member

Uniting without Care?

A study in half truths and how the secular press misses the mark.

Peter
Bentley

ACC National Director



Some of our readers may have wondered when they saw the December ACCatalyst cover whether ACC was tapping into *The Daily Telegraph* story on Uniting. Their headlines read: “JESUS WIPED” (with the subhead proclaiming “Top Church Losing its Religion”. (2 December 2016), and in a Tim Blair blog post (2 December 2016): ‘UNITING CHURCH NOT SO CHURCHY THESE DAYS.’

Actually, our magazine had just gone to print, so the cover (designed by Wes Selwood of Selwood Media) was unrelated to this coverage (if you have not read the cover story check out the edition on the ACC website), but it has helped to promote the discussion about the nature of the change and the future of the UCA and its community services, especially in the move from UnitingCare to Uniting.

The Daily Telegraph story certainly stirred reaction. The Moderator of the Uniting Church in Australia, (NSW and the ACT), The Rev. Myung Hwa Park issued a press release on 2 December 2016, and among other points stated that:

“The Church is not removing any symbols or reference to Christ from its branding.

The Church does not seek to distance itself from survivors of child sex abuse. Such assertions are untrue, hurtful and disrespectful to survivors. ... About a year ago Uniting underwent a thoroughly researched and comprehensive rebrand and this was with the blessing of the Synod so that Uniting could have a brand that further enhances their services.”

The Moderator’s closing statement said: “Never before have we been more united and blessed as a Church.”

Personally, I think this comment could have been left out as it sounded like special pleading.

The National Assembly also issued its dismay in a much more strongly worded press release on the same day, with the President, Stuart McMillan, thanking “... the many Uniting Church members and supporters who have condemned the *Daily Telegraph* for its disgraceful coverage.”

Mr McMillan argued that: “Uniting, the largest provider of social services in NSW/ACT, changed its brand name last year. This decision was taken to ensure that awareness of our services reaches more of the vulnerable and disadvantaged people we seek to serve. Preparation for moves towards the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the shift to self-managed care were important considerations in this decision. Other church agencies are considering adopting the Uniting brand.”

Uniting Victoria and Tasmania Ltd was established on 3 October 2016, with the expected merger of the 21 Uniting Care agencies and Wesley Mission Victoria to be completed by the middle of 2017. Interestingly UnitingCare Australia remains the national body for the ‘UnitingCare Network’.

I am one among many members who fail to be convinced by the new design logo for Uniting. While the UCA logo is very much a 1960s-style design, the cross is very plain, and I am sure that few church members, let alone secular people perceive the ‘t’ in Uniting as a cross.

There is still however a theological statement and related UCA material on the Uniting website, though one does have to search a bit. There are also more direct connections as Uniting (NSW & ACT) states in their purpose and values statement that: “We’re proud to be the community services and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church in NSW and ACT. Our foundation is Christ’s invitation to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected and just world”.

And in Our Foundation: that “Christ invites us to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected and just world.”

In searching the website in mid-February, I found the following search results:

12 references for Christ, 17 for power, 17 for medically-



Main Image: The front page of The Daily Telegraph, 2nd December 2016 (image: assembly.uca.org.au). Inset Top: ACCatalyst Cover at the same time. Inset Bottom: the 'controversial' new Uniting logo.

supervised-injecting-centre; 38 for church and 77 for love. There was also a good deal of focus (perhaps related to the time of the year) at having a Rainbow Tick accreditation (7 results).

From the Uniting (NSW&ACT) website under events: Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

"At Uniting, [we] celebrate diversity and welcome you exactly as you are. That's why we're proud to be standing with our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) friends at the 2017 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. This year we want to show the world that love is the most epic superpower there is. Love can amplify and spread as a force for good, helping individuals and communities overcome challenges enabling us to be our true selves. This LGBTI Sydney Mardi Gras, we want to show that love is power."

Why did *The Daily Telegraph* run with these stories at this time, especially when their prime reference were points raised in a letter to *Insights* (NSW & ACT Synod magazine) back in August? John Sandeman in *Eternity News* (2 December 2016) interestingly noted that secular newspapers do tend to run more religious stories in December, but also pointed to the newspaper's following of sexual abuse cases, including the tragic circumstances of the Girl X case at a 'Uniting Church' foster refuge.


What can we learn from *The Daily Telegraph* saga?

Firstly, it is never helpful to base your understanding about issues in the church or religion on what is reported in a secular newspaper. There are simply no experienced religious affairs reporters left in mainstream Australian papers, and other reporters

are less likely to understand the nuances, and provide a reasoned news report without sensationalism.

Secondly, often a secular organisation will raise issues that need to be addressed by a church, so take the opportunity to discuss and consider the underlying questions.

Thirdly, there is a need for a serious discussion about the future of the UCA. Many Christian organisations set out to do good, and they 'did good' very well, but eventually the Christian foundation became a mere footnote in their history.

June will witness a gathering in Adelaide of Uniting Church historians, theologians and interested members for a 40th anniversary celebration (and the launch of a National Historical Society). It will be illuminating to hear the message, content and overall theology presented. 

Playing Music for Church

The venue was packed with thousands of people. The worship team had a world-wide reputation; the music was CD quality and the songs modern and well known. The singers were pitch perfect and enthusiastic. Then as a chorus was about to be repeated the leader called out “over to you” and pointed the microphone to the audience. No singing could be heard. After a few seconds the technicians turned the music down, but it was too late – the audience had not been participating and was not about to start now.

On another occasion, the dining room of a country pub was filled with about fifty people. A solo keyboard player led the singing. The songs were all well known and from the very beginning the singing, as they say, lifted the roof.

So the best equipped and prepared music team in a large auditorium filled with committed Christians can hardly raise a whisper, but a small country gathering can “sing like never before”. Why the difference?

Is it the willingness of the people? Hardly. Christians everywhere and any time nearly always want to sing.

Is it the technical ability of the musicians? Not usually.

Is it the character of the musicians? No. Generally good character is a standard prerequisite.

While it is understood that the church musician must be a committed follower of Jesus Christ, a person of good character, a worshipper and more, there are three characteristics that seem to be overlooked in even the most detailed books on this subject, and when absent, help to explain why things may not be as they should be.

1 Love the People
Effective church musicians love the people.

A love for the people causes the musician to want to do whatever can be done to provide the best possible environment for a full, open and enthusiastic response in song from the people who will be seen as a group of individuals rather than an individual group.

A love for the people means getting to know them and empathising with them.

A love for the people mitigates the “look what I can do” tendency inherent in all musicians and instead encourages a “this is for you” mentality, playing in a way that works best for the people.

A love for the people means the musician will be happy to play the boring music well because the people love to sing it.

A love for the people means the musician will play to maximise the singing of harmony within the congregation. Sadly this applies less today than in the past when four part congregational singing was common, but one example is “It is well with my soul” where the correct chords and notes must be played in the chorus to encourage the harmonies in the echo, otherwise it falls flat.

There will be times when the musician knows it will bless the people if the volume, tempo or pitch is varied during the singing, and this should be done to enhance the overall impact. Obviously this would be initiated by the musician, but the congregation needs to be comfortable with the variation.

To lift the volume of singing, without quenching it, the music volume needs to be the right degree of loudness above the congregation, drawing the people with it. Too much and the opposite will occur. Too little and there is no impact. Get it right. Feel it.

So the church musician plays for the people with a genuine desire that

they will enjoy it and be encouraged to participate.

2 Listen

Effective church musicians listen to the people singing.

Musicians have the responsibility to set the initial tempo, pitch and volume of a song but this can make them think they should have the primary influence in how a song proceeds. Rehearsals generally reinforce this view. But this thinking needs modification, even a complete reversal to the point where it is understood that the congregation must have the major influence.

This is a concept foreign to most church musicians. Musicians need to learn the art of listening to the singing and responding to it according to the occasion.

Listening means continually monitoring how things are going, phrase by phrase. Is playing an octave higher really helping, regardless of whether it sounds great and it’s what was practised? Is the trombone harmony putting the people off or adding to their participation? Do the people want to sing slower or faster?

Maybe it was decided to sing this verse unaccompanied but it’s going flat. Time now to make a choice. Do I start playing now to bring the singing back to pitch, or if they’ve gone really flat, play a semitone lower when it’s time to play again? Or give a bit of a lead in on the correct key when it’s time to play again? Or leave the rest of the song unaccompanied? What would be best for the people?

Why aren’t the people singing? Why are they looking at me like that? Maybe the words are not on the screen. Or I’m playing the wrong music. Or that clever introduction just did not work. Or there’s smoke coming from the amplifier.

Maybe the people are tiring, but the plan was to repeat the chorus two

more times, or to have that next song on the list. It may be better not to.

Maybe the congregation is responding differently to what was anticipated which requires an appropriate and corresponding change in the way the music is being played.

When musicians listen to the congregation and adjust their playing accordingly, their overall effectiveness will be greatly enhanced.

3 Feel the Words

Effective church musicians are impacted by the words of the songs.

Sunday dinner provided the opportunity for a bit of a recap of the morning's service. Our house was right next door, and sometimes it was: "O dear, the chooks just kept on squawking all the way through the sermon". But once my mother commented "Did you notice the organist had tears in his eyes when playing during communion?" Actually I hadn't, but even as a child I understood it wasn't the music or the selection of stops or the organist's skill alone that made the impact, as important as they all were, but the unsung words.

Sadly, church musicians are often unaware of the words being sung, and therefore cannot be impacted by them. Conversely and simultaneously, the congregation is more impacted by the words than by the music. That is a significant disconnect between musician and congregation which needs to be set right.

For example, the second verse of "How Great Thou Art" includes the words "lofty mountain grandeur" and "and feel the gentle breeze". How the congregation responds when the first phrase is played with grandness, and then the volume drops for the second. It is like the people are thinking "Oh, the musician gets it".

Words have punctuation. Generally, music is not notated (punctuated) in a way that matches the words. This is particularly the case with songs of more than one verse when different verses have different punctuation. If the musician is able to incorporate the verse's punctuation into the music, it will greatly assist the congregation to appreciate what is being sung.

For example, the hymn "Man of

Sorrows" should have a distinct break after that first phrase. Then the following phrase "What a name for the Son of man" is a single phrase written over two lines, but should be played without a break after "name".

Like appropriate variations to volume, incorporating correct punctuation into the music also signifies that the musician "gets it".

And maybe the words of the last verse of a song suggest modulation. The last verse of the previously mentioned "Man of sorrows" is a good example where a tone higher (e.g. Bb to C) has a significant impact. Just make sure that the final key is not pitched too high. Incidentally many CD songs sound great but are pitched too high for congregational singing, making them unsuitable for backing music.

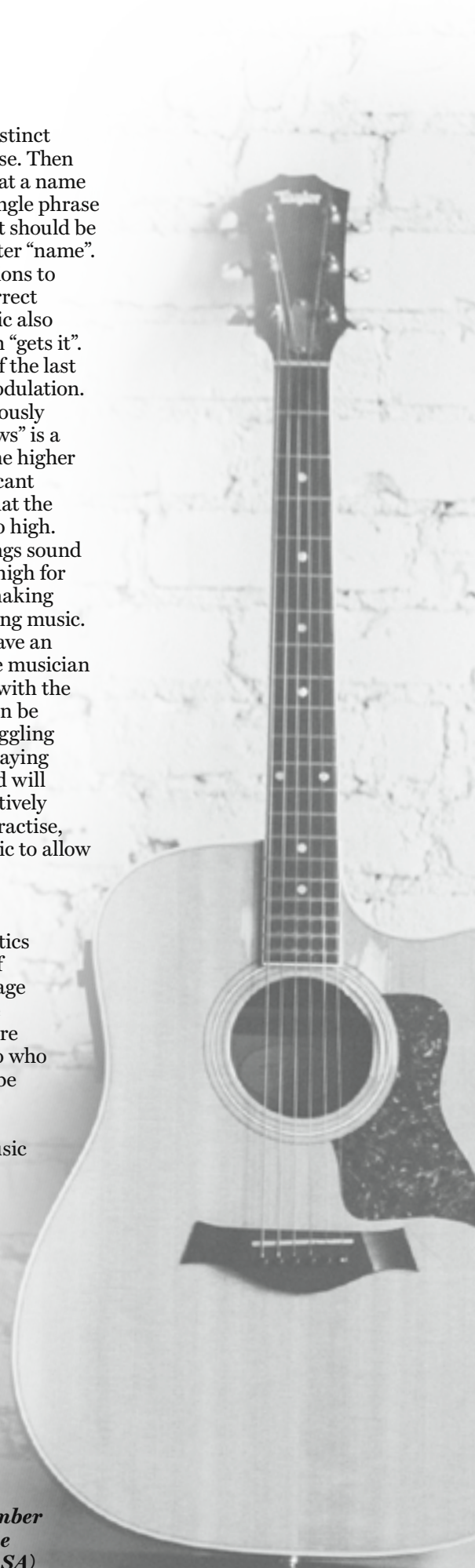
To allow the words to have an impact on the playing, the musician needs to be very familiar with the music so that attention can be placed on the words. Struggling with the music prevents paying attention to the words and will cause the music to be relatively flat and uninspiring. So practise, practise, practise the music to allow focussing on the words.

Summary

These three characteristics are largely independent of the level of skill. The average player who develops these characteristics will be more effective than the virtuoso who does not. Average player, be encouraged!

Church music is for the congregation. Church music is to facilitate the praise and worship of God by the congregation. Musicians therefore have a duty to do all in their power to make it as easy as possible, and to provide as much encouragement as possible, to maximise congregational participation, and to make the overall experience enjoyable for them.

Warren Mack is a member of ACC Congregation The Branches UC (Modbury SA)



“Be true to yourself”

The transgender issue has come into focus through stories of celebrities transitioning from one gender to the other, the debate over bathrooms, prisons and military service, as well as the so-called “Safe Schools” program. This program purports to be about stopping bullying but in fact focuses on telling children that they don’t have to accept their gender assigned at birth, but can be whatever they want to be.

In this small volume, Roberts’ continual emphasis is on the need to deal with this issue with sensitivity and compassion, because we are not just dealing with theories and labels but with issues that affect some people quite seriously. He argues that people affected by concerns about their gender can be harmed if these issues are discussed in a pejorative manner. Some people (a very small group) genuinely experience a disjunction between their assigned gender and their inner feelings about their identity. These people are usually labelled as experiencing gender dysphoria. Roberts provides a useful set of definitions related to this issue.

Roberts notes that, at least in Western cultures, we are living in a time of rampant individualism that began with the Enlightenment and its focus on human reasoning. Today there is a strong focus, including in pop songs, on complete autonomy for each individual. “It’s my life and I’ll do what I want with it”. Further, he points out, there is also a strong emphasis on authenticity. We are encouraged to be “true to ourselves”, and not be bound by any moral code that limits our freedom “to be who we truly are”. It is obvious where such an emphasis can lead. In this context, out-



Transgender *by Vaughan Roberts*

Talking Points Book,
Good Book Company (2016)
75 pages

Reviewed by Patricia Noller

dated, constricting binary gender (male and female) has no place. It is no wonder that our culture and the people in it are struggling with an identity crisis that is making life much more complex.

Vaughan Roberts uses the analogy of art restoration in discussing the role of creation in determining our gender. These

**As we find our
place within
God’s story, we
discover our
real identity,
true freedom
and lasting
fulfilment.”**
**- Vaughan
Roberts**

skilled workers know that the important role they have to play is to “bring out the artist’s original intention”. God was the artist who made us and declared his creation good. Thus Roberts argues that our identity “is not for us to create” but is given by God. Roberts also discusses the low view of the body

that infected Christianity in the early church, along with denial of the fact that we have been created sexual beings. He argues that “each person’s biologically-determined sex” is a gift from God and should be accepted as such.

This book is one of a series of booklets on “Talking Points”. Tim Thornborough begins his introduction to this book by discussing the changes that have taken place, particularly in the West, with regard to values. He notes that over the last 50 years “we have moved to a widespread adoption of liberal values, many of which are in conflict with the teachings of the Bible” (p.7). Acknowledging that we as Christians have much to repent of in terms of the way we have often responded to social change, he urges Christians to start talking to one another about these issues and to “search the Scriptures together” (p.9). He notes that issues raised by the current focus on transgender, need to be discussed in the context of the primary focus of the Scriptures on the stories of creation, the fall, redemption and eternity. I believe that we can look forward to more similar volumes in this series, dealing with the complex issues of our time.

Patricia Noller Ph.D (Pat is a member of the ACC Queensland Committee)

STEALING FROM A CHILD

THE INJUSTICE OF
'MARRIAGE EQUALITY'

David van Gend

Stealing from a child *by David van Gend*

Connor Court Publishing, (2016)
270 pages

Reviewed by Professor Brian Hill

A strong recommendation to thinking friends. After much thought, I agree with the author of the book shown here that if Same-Sex Marriage is made law, our culture will change radically in ways of which the average person is unaware. I admire Penny Wong as a thoughtful and socially responsible politician, but her remark that SSM will effect a small change without any dire social consequences is, on all the evidence available, naïve in the extreme.

I fear that many good people, accepting such reassurances at face value, are sleeping through an escalating culture war. Dr van Gend's analysis, by contrast, convincingly argues that in statistical terms, SSM will have serious flow-on effects, especially for children.

Dr van Gend is a qualified and experienced medical practitioner in Queensland. For some years he has been President of the Australian Marriage Forum. Having recently heard Dr van Gend speak at a launch of this book, I believe him to be a genuine and competent researcher, not given to wild generalisations.

Further, having marked many academic theses in my time, and after careful reading of this book, I judge the book to be a solid analysis of evidence-based research. This book does not rely on particular religious beliefs to prove its case. Rather, it documents many statistically secure findings from social and psychological sources.

In later chapters of the book, he also reviews the Safe Schools program, which has been widely publicised as an "anti-bullying program." The evidence he presents is again very strong. Safe Schools is shown to be a deliberate and ideologically driven attempt to promote an agenda of gay sex education in schools, by-passing parental consent if necessary. It aims to encourage all children from the earliest school years to consider their own gender perceptions fluid, and to engage in sexual experimentation. On ethical grounds, I rate this as indoctrination, not education.

Incidentally, for a clearer idea of what will happen to parents if the Safe Schools program is made compulsory, view the testimony of a parent. This parent read the Safe Schools material and withdrew her children from Frankston High School in Victoria, after having been refused her right to have the children opt out from this material because it was across the curriculum subjects. It is a rivetting 9 minutes (google Cella's Story).

At \$30, the book deserves wide dissemination.

Professor Brian Hill is Emeritus Professor at Murdoch University and was Foundation Professor and Dean at the School of Education.

DEVOTION

Hearing the Word of God

ROMANS 10:17
**Consequently, faith
comes from hearing the
message, and the
message is heard
through the word about
Christ. (NIV)**

*Jesus repeatedly challenged the Scribes, Pharisees
and the disciples with words that said
they had eyes but could not see,
ears that could not hear and hearts that were hardened.*

*Our faith comes by
seeing and hearing the Word of God.
And not through the lies, deceit and hatred
that so often fills our world
of seeing and hearing.*

*Jesus continually reminds us
that we must hear and be obedient to His Word.*

*The scriptures are the fertile soil
in which our love of God becomes real
and our faith in Jesus grows.*

*Our fertile soil comes
from reading His Word.
If our eyes are not open
and our ears unstopped
then our hearts will not be receptive
to the Word of God.*

This is not just when we find time to read the Word.

*It must become a repeated, regular
and daily exercise for us.*

*Through the Holy Spirit
we are guided into seeing and hearing.*

*Through the Spirit
our hearts
become receptive to God's love for us.*

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

Australia Day?

For a number of years now, the time surrounding Australia Day reignites a debate over whether the date of our national day should be changed. When I first became aware of the argument, I was indifferent. However, as I learned more of the history of our country and as God has drawn me closer to his heartbeat of love and justice, I have become increasingly open to the possibility.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 reminds us that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. It is right to gather with our fellow Australians to celebrate our country. The beautiful landscapes, the ancient heritage of our Indigenous peoples, the resilience of the early settlers and the vibrant diversity of present-day Australia. There is much in our country to thank God for. Yet, there is also a sense that we must mourn, when we remember the tragedies that have occurred among our Indigenous peoples in this country's history. Since the arrival of the first Europeans in Australia, the Indigenous peoples have been marginalised and oppressed. They have been displaced from their land, removed from their families and in some cases treated as less than human. Even now, there are issues of social justice relating to Indigenous communities that need to be addressed.

For many people, Australia Day is a time to celebrate our country and to offer thanksgiving to God for the countless blessings he has given us. However, as it also coincides with the anniversary of British colonialism, it is seen by others as Invasion Day; a time to mourn not to dance. For those who are aware, this casts a shadow over our celebrations. Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is deeply important, yet our national day has this tragic divide, with one group celebrating and another group mourning.



As Christians, we're called to be at the forefront of efforts for reconciliation. If that means changing the date of our national day so that we can have unity in our celebration and mourning, then I am open to that. It goes beyond that, though. It means taking up the biblical call to weep with those who are weeping and to rejoice with those who are rejoicing. It means no matter what our cultural background is, weeping over the shameful treatment of the Indigenous peoples. It means rejoicing in this country's Indigenous heritage as well as in the layers of heritage added to our country through the waves of migration. I don't know for certain if they must be on separate days. Maybe the two could coexist on the same day, at different times; maybe they could occur on two consecutive days. There are many possibilities for such a complex issue. Whatever happens, I believe that both mourning and rejoicing must be done wholeheartedly and with integrity, at separate times, sacred to each purpose.

Bella Easterbrook is an ACC member in NSW

REFLECTION

Lamentations 3:19-23

"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me." (Lamentations 3:19-20).

As Jeremiah meditates on his afflictions and wanderings he becomes downcast and loses his hope and joy. The devil aims to keep the whole world for ever in this misery of spirit – in guilt, shame and frustration. The sinful nature offers nothing but empty distractions to this turmoil.

Jeremiah continues, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lam

3:21-23).

He has to 'call to mind' the Lord's great love and compassion. He has to call them by faith because such glorious blessings cannot come from the human heart. These blessings from God renew us every morning from our downcast state – they go on bringing life and peace.

When your life becomes a hopeless mess, rather than using your fading strength to try to drag yourself out, lift your eyes to the God of grace and mercy. God alone can bring salvation and restoration for the troubled heart. God heals with His forgiveness and acceptance pouring out His Holy Spirit on all who call on His name.

Devotionals are provided by Rev. Derek Schiller and are available via an APP for iPhone or Android. Each day a new devotion is provided. You can download the APP from the Website by following the link: <http://stgeorge.unitingchurch.org.au/wcms/acc-devotion-app/>



THIS IS THE ACC

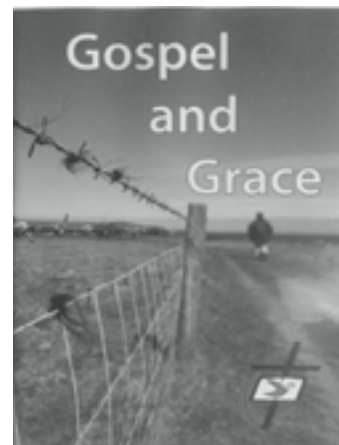
Featured resource: Gospel and Grace DVD

The ACC Discipleship and Evangelism Commission of the ACC has prepared a series of talks about how the grace of God which comes through the Gospel of Jesus affects every aspect of our lives. Often the Good News of Jesus can seem abstract or unattached to many areas of our lives and yet our knowledge of, and the fact of our justification is central to every part of our lives.

Talks include personal testimony illustrating how the Gospel impacts the Christian life within family, church and community. These talks would make an excellent discussion starter for a small group.

Note: all ACC congregations and groups should have received a copy of the DVD and all the talks are available on the ACC youtube site:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/confessingchrist>



What happens next

- March 5-8: ACC National Council and committees
- March 19: Peter Bentley at Queensland ACC regional gathering at Wilsonton UC (3 pm)
- March 26: Hunter Cluster at Booragul UC
- May 15: ACC Executive Meeting
- September 11-13: ACC National Conference, Mount Louisa House of Praise, Townsville

For ACC resources see the website: this includes every edition of the **ACCatalyst Magazine**

(available to download as a PDF).



confessingcongregations.com



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:

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



Liam Neeson in *Silence* (2016)

In the Silence



Silence
(2016) MA 15+

Starring:
Andrew Garfield,
Liam Neeson
Directed by:
Martin Scorsese

S*ilence* is a strangely beautiful and yet alarmingly horrifying depiction of a quite savage period in Christian history. The context here is the period after the first 'opening up' of Japan in the middle 16th century, and then the reaction, and the desire to purify and rid Japan of foreign influences (not only Christian, but associated). Possibly thousands of Christians were martyred during this time, with one of the most well-known being the crucifixion in Nagasaki on February 5, 1597 of twenty-six Christians including six European Franciscan missionaries and three Japanese Jesuits. Persecution continued into the 1630s and the film itself is set in this later period following a major rebellion that had some Christian context, though was also related to other factors. The film itself provides an eye-opener into the never-ending methods of torture and killing that mankind develops at times when they desire revenge and destruction.

The film is based on the 1966 book by Shusaku Endo, and directed by

the influential and controversial 'actors' director' Martin Scorsese. Apparently, it was a nearly three-decades long personal project to bring the film to fruition. This film is oddly reminiscent at times of Terrence Malick films with the soft voice-over and lyrical filming. Like Scorsese, Malick focusses on people exploring their beliefs in extraordinary times.

Intriguingly Andrew Garfield, who played the main Christian character in *Hacksaw Ridge*, plays one of the Jesuit priests Father Rodrigues who goes in search of his mentor Father Ferreira (played by Liam Neeson), partly to find out if there is truth to the rumour that he 'apostatised'? The film also follows the struggles of Father Rodrigues and his companions. This is the 'silence' connection – even in the times that there is seemingly silence by God, God is there. As Father Rodrigues observes, "It was in the silence that I heard Your voice."

There are certainly some theological questions raised due to the Catholic context (especially in related to confession and prayer), but these need to be considered in the strong pastoral context where the priests gave totally of themselves to serve their people. There are also incredible moments that we all hope we would never have to personally face:

What would you do in a situation where;

a) Your life will be spared if you

deny your faith?

b) Others will be spared if you deny your faith?

c) You are tortured simply for having a Christian symbol in your possession?

d) You repeatedly deny Christ and yet are so burdened you repeatedly seek forgiveness?

There is another whole theme in the film about the hidden or 'secret Christians', and readers may be aware of this context in China after the expulsion of missionaries in 1949, in countries in the former Soviet Bloc, and in middle eastern countries today. The 'secret Christian' remains a theme throughout the movie right to the incredible end.

The early 17th century was a very public period of confrontation for the local Christians, and yet it was also an isolated period for Japan itself. In contrast to today, it was of course a time without social media and the broadcasting of martyrdom. This is very much an adult film, but one that I believe will lead you to think deeply about your faith. It will have a short season at the cinema, but given the length of the film, it may be best watched at home with a group. Then you can take a break at an appropriate time, perhaps even spend some time in prayer and reflection, before preparing yourself for the final part of this quite searing and intriguing drama.

Peter Bentley is the ACC's National Director