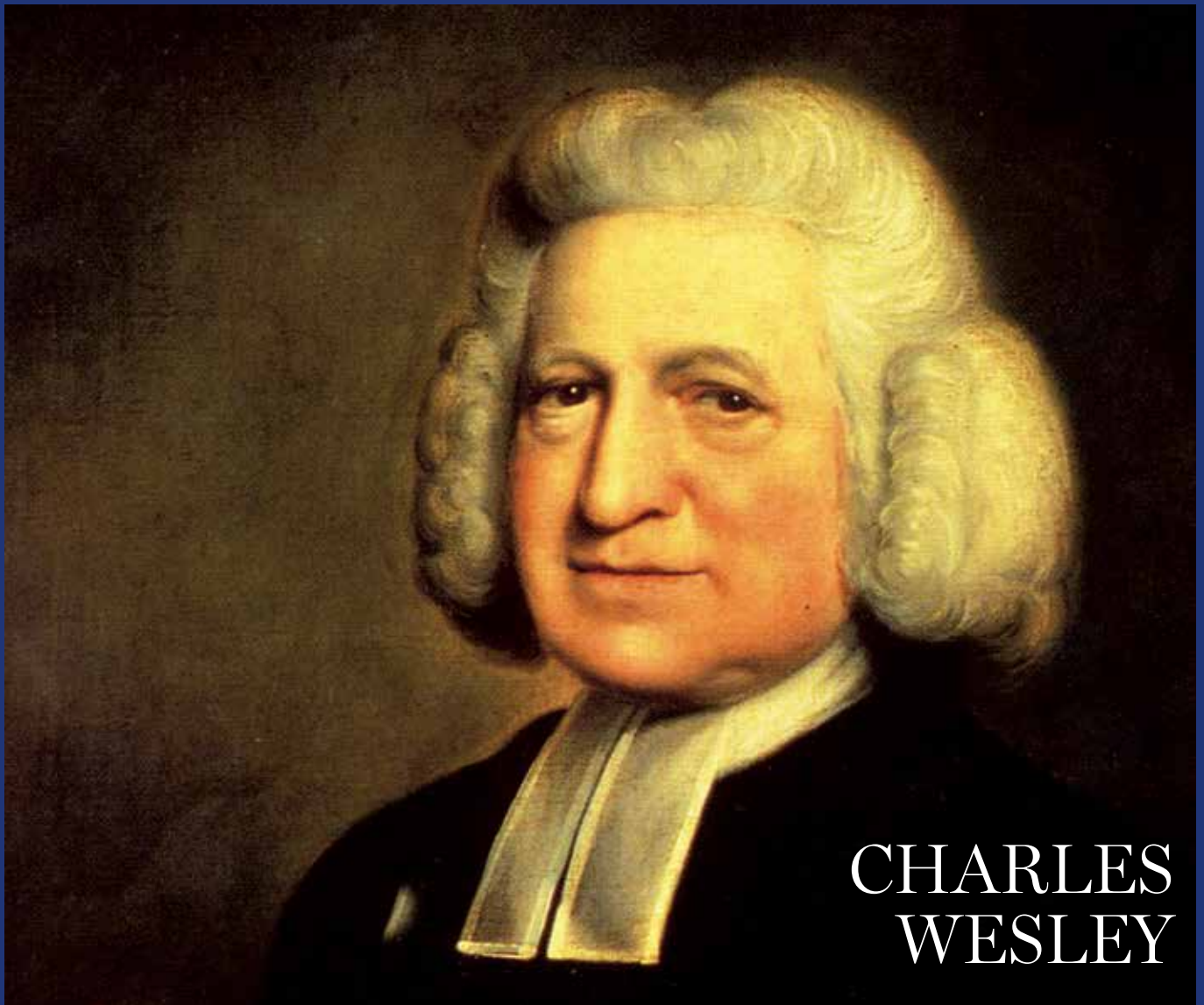


VOLUME 7 NUMBER 1 | FEBRUARY 2013

# ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



CHARLES  
WESLEY

## Worship

Our God is a God  
who talks

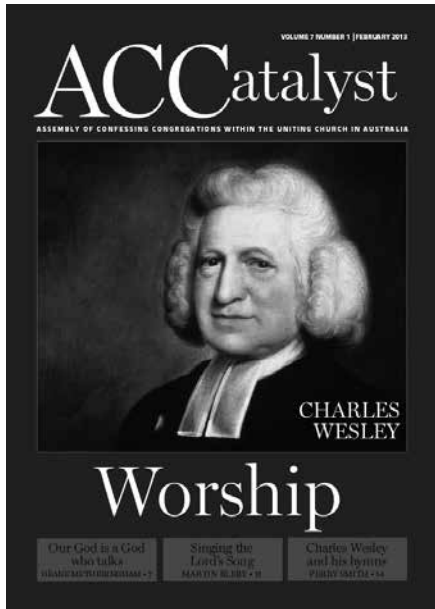
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Cover illustration bluecrystal/istockphoto.com

## EDITORIAL

# Thanks, New Creation

In siting its Annual Conference for 2012 in Adelaide, ACC chose strong speakers from that city to address the issue of “worship”. Deane Metherringham’s and Martin Bleby’s talks feature in this edition of ACCatalyst.

These men also have had a long association with New Creation Teaching Ministry, a key group in SA that has had a profound impact on that state’s Christian culture. Its founder, Geoffrey Bingham, gave

the group its distinctive ability to tie charismatic and reformed Christianity together. As this ACCatalyst was being prepared the news came that NCTM was closing down. Not because it had run out of steam—it drew a record crowd to its Summer School this year. Rather, NCTM leaders believe that its message has entered the DNA of many churches. And also this magazine’s. And mine.

*John Sandeman*

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Executive Editor: Max Champion  
 Managing Editor: Peter Bentley  
 Editor: John Sandeman  
 Office: 2 Erskineville Rd, Newtown NSW  
 02 9550 5358  
 Website: [confessingcongregations.com](http://confessingcongregations.com)  
[accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com)

Email for ACCatalyst:  
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It was Valentine’s Day and I was quite happy to baby-sit my nieces Ebony, 5 and Tahlia, 3 and my nephew Riley, 5 months, while my sister and brother-in-law went out to tea. I was expecting that the kids would soon be in bed asleep and I could have a quiet evening. The girls went to bed, and after a bit of giggling and talking, went to sleep. Riley was in bed asleep by the time Jenny and John left.

Easy, I thought. However, 20 minutes after they were gone, Riley woke up. He was hot and he wanted a feed. I took him in the lounge room and cuddled him. He cried.

“C’mon, Riley, you’re normally fast asleep by now”, I said.

“Mamamama” said Riley. And he cried again.

We went outside and I put him on his beloved baby swing. He stopped crying, and watched me with his big blue eyes. For 20 minutes he swung. But he would not go to sleep. We walked round and round inside the house. I sang. I tried everything. Riley would not sleep. And he did not sleep until his Mum was home and he had a feed. There are times when a little boy needs his Mummy

# The little boy who wouldn’t go to sleep



Hilary Sandeman

and no one else will do. Nothing else will satisfy.

In much the same way, we need our Father in heaven. We need him

in our lives, to feed our spirits and to nurture us and help us grow. We need his love. Of course, we like to think of ourselves as independent. We like to think we don’t need to depend on God, so we try and replace him with all kind of other things.

We try and satisfy our innermost needs with our work, our hobbies, our families or our football team. As good as those things might be, they can never replace God. They are like a hungry baby shoving his fist in his mouth - it’s not going to do the job.

But fortunately, God freely offers us himself: his forgiveness, his love and acceptance, his blessings, his life and his Hope. All we need to do is receive. It’s a pretty good deal! My sister does not expect Riley to repay her for looking after him. Indeed, he can’t, because he’s a baby. What she delights in is the relationship they have, when Riley looks up at her and smiles.

We can never repay our Father. He doesn’t expect it, but he too delights in our relationship with him, as we rest securely in his arms. *Thank you, loving God, for your tender care towards us.*

*Robyn*



The Woodbridge, Tasmania Congregation

Ted Curnow

## Trip around Tasmania

The Isle to the south has always been a little different from the mainland.

Over the last fifteen years, the Tasmanian Presbytery has been unique because it has benefited from an evangelical voice and two representatives from the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church.

“Father in the faith” for many, Rev Bob Imms has seen interest in the ACC grow over the years. Bob has also become recognised for his gift in prose known as “Seeds for Harvesting,” on the current website. An ACC Southern Tasmanian Cluster of about twenty people drawn from five Congregations in the area meet quarterly in Wesley Hall Hobart. They gather to worship, feast on the Word, for discussion, to pray and to care for others. The average age of members is increasing but their outlook is as fresh and as crisp as a Tasmanian apple. The Isle is a place of outstanding natural beauty and heading south from Hobart along the Channel Highway beyond Peppermint Bay with its apple and pear orchards is a well-kept little Uniting Church Chapel at Woodbridge. Vic Malham, past editor of the Travelling EMU is part of the small welcoming congregation that shares an interest in the ACC. Like many rural churches, geographically isolated and ageing they often feel forgotten by the church because they are without a minister. On one occasion they hosted a gathering of five similar churches in the area for mutual encouragement. The Woodbridge church still shares a concern for

local mission and they have pooled resources recently to fund a Youth Concert and Workshop in the local high school. They are specifically seeking God’s direction for their future. One can only feel that churches like this would benefit from the support that flows from belonging to the ACC.

On the north coast, the St Helens, Sprent and Ulverstone Churches are already ACC Congregations. At Ulverstone, Rev Deva Sugirtharaj, known as the Tasmanian ACC Evangelist, has been effective in bringing a number of small churches together. The church here also recently invited Rev Rod and Shirley James to share in their 150th Church Anniversary celebration. The Scottsdale Uniting Church in the North-east has connections with the ACC and it provides oversight to the St Helens church with help from Rev Walter Abetz (ACC National Council Secretary).

On the east coast, Swansea is a joint Uniting Church/Anglican arrangement and while not a Confessing Congregation, the ACC is well represented. Barrie Robinson is the Tasmanian representative on the National Prayer Network and is part of the Invermay Church, near Launceston.

In the North West area, the Wesley Vale Community Church also has an ACC representative. Overall it could be said the small Isle makes a big impact and a significant contribution to the ACC in supporting an important Evangelical voice within the Uniting Church. *A Crisp*

## Remembering Robert Iles

More than 140 people gathered at Burnside City Church on November 7, 2012 to hear the inaugural Robert Iles Memorial Trust Lecture.

The lecture—the first in a series of five that will be presented annually—was the brainchild of the Robert Iles Memorial Trust as a way of honouring issues close to Robert’s heart and continuing his passion for the renewal of the church.

Professor Brian Edgar of Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, USA presented an outstanding lecture entitled ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ which discussed the relationship between Christ and culture.

*The Robert Iles lecture will be in the next edition of ACCatalyst.*

## John Hudson

Rev John Hudson died on February 16, 2013 in Melbourne aged 75 years, following a long period of illness.

John was a member of the ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission and regular participant in ACC conferences and Victorian ACC events. Our prayers are with Dr Rosalie Hudson (our former convenor of the Doctrine and Theology Commission), and her family. The family chose Romans 8: 38-39 to include in the funeral notice: *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## Robert Weatherlake

Rev Dr Robert Weatherlake died on December 26, 2012 in Melbourne, aged 85 years. Robert was well-known in church circles throughout Australia for his work with the Fellowship for Revival (FFR) (Victoria and National), and also EMU a forerunner of ACC (especially helping FFR & EMU work together), and he continued his active support of confessing and renewal movements through the ACC. Our prayers are with his daughter Ruth, sons Peter, John and Philip and their families. It is hoped that a longer piece recognising Robert’s involvement in the reform and renewal movements will be included in *ACCatalyst* in the near future.



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## PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

### The Politics of the Kingdom

*A sermon for Christ the King. Lessons – Psalm 93; Revelation 14-8; John 18:33-38*

The readings set for the Festival of Christ the King are highly political.

The Psalmist praises the 'Lord as the king' whose everlasting power is "for ever and for evermore" (Psalm 93:1,2,5). In the Book of Revelation

John acknowledges that the crucified-and-risen Christ is 'the ruler of the kings of the earth' in obedience to God the Father whose dominion is 'for ever and ever' (Revelation 1:6,7). And Jesus tells a powerful political leader that his Kingdom "is in, but not of, the world" (John 18:36).

Even though political intrigue and a desire for political solutions to our problems dominate the news, politics is not ultimate! So, what Jesus says is highly controversial. He calls disciples to be "in the world" without giving their ultimate loyalty to politicians or the political process.

That might seem obvious. Many of us are dismayed at the appalling level of political debate in Australia today. At the same time we have unreasonable expectations of politicians. We often say 'the government should fix it' and assume that all would be well if only people voted for our political party.

Jesus does not get involved in 'party politics'. There are things that belong to Caesar and things that belong to God! In saying that "My kingdom is not of this world" (v36), Jesus is not advocating a retreat from politics.

He is issuing an invitation to belong to a different kind of community: a community that is established "from everlasting to everlasting" by the Creator of all things and the Redeem-

er of our broken humanity. Unlike political kingdoms that last for a time, the Kingdom of God stretches back to the creation of all things and forward to their consummation.

The ruler of this everlasting Kingdom is rightly described as the Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end – who was and is and is to come (Revelation 1:8; 4:8).

There has always been a tension in the relationship between the political kingdoms and the Kingdom of God.

Politicians like Pilate often assume they are ultimately responsible for the well-being of their countries and that the churches should play a role in supporting their efforts to maintain social harmony. At such times, they need to be reminded that the destiny of their nation—and all nations—is in the hands of God. Politicians and the State have an important but limited role to play!

It is instructive that the festival of Christ the King was first instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to remind Italian Christians that their primary allegiance was to Jesus Christ, not to the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Likewise, in the Barmen Declaration (1934), Christians in Germany declared "Jesus is Lord—Hitler is not!"

Thus "Christianity entails the invariably political announcement that Jesus Christ, not Caesar, is Lord; and that to concede that politicians may legitimately ignore this highly specific theological claim is nothing less than an abandonment of the Christian position" (*First Things* 43, p10). The State has an important but limited role.

Christians should recognise the limited role of the Church in the affairs of the State. She is not a religious political party that exists to pass comment on each and every political issue. Today, this basic point is lost on many mainline church leaders whose

frequent criticisms of public policy often mirror the ideals of progressives and civil libertarians. In other times and places, when their views mirrored conservative values, the problem was the same. Instead of reminding politicians about their limited authority, and challenging the State whenever it is tempted to over-reach its God-given mandate, churches often claim that a particular political ideology—Left, Right or Centre—is the will of God.

This is not to denigrate politics. To be 'not of this world' does not mean turning away to a private religious life. Jesus himself recognises the legitimacy of Pilate's authority. The Church must be discerning in making pronouncements about which public issues must be addressed and which are not crucially important.

There are many issues that should concern a Church that is called to embody the humanity displayed in Jesus. She should speak out wherever political policies demean human dignity and mock the good purposes of God. For example, she should support the right treatment of refugees, unborn and abused children, women and minorities and the frail elderly and oppose permissive sexuality, the destruction of marriage and restrictions on freedom of belief.

Today we should be under no illusions! There are powerful forces at work in Australian public life that are determined to treat belief in God as a 'private' matter that must be excluded from the public arena. In acknowledging that some things in the public sphere belong to Caesar and some to God, the Church should protest when there is a strong, militant push by the State to assume absolute power to decide what Christians and others may legitimately think, believe and do in worship, education,

health and social welfare.

The State does have a divinely ordained purpose. It is to restrain evil, to uphold just laws, to create a climate in which individuals and communities may flourish and to permit the Church to preach the Gospel and allow it to be expressed in social forms. However, when the State overreaches its mandate and enforces policies that mock faith in God and demean our God-given human dignity, the Church must protest.

The necessity for protest is not based on a negative view of politics as such. Jesus accepted Pilate's authority to sentence him to death as a representative of the God-ordained State! But in saying "my kingship is not of this world" he showed that our participation 'in the world of politics' is to be determined by an 'extra-political' consideration. Because Christ the King—unlike other rulers—has come to 'bear witness to the truth', no politician, church leader or party—Left, Right or Centre—may claim the absolute right to determine what its citizens must regard as ultimately true. The State has no right to prescribe (lay down) the truth and thus to proscribe (forbid) beliefs and actions that do not agree with the prevailing ideology.

The Church's primary political role therefore is—as the French theologian Jacques Ellul said—to debunk the 'political illusion'. The State is not the source of what is good and true and the judge of all things humane.

When it passes legislation that mocks the glory of God or the glory for which we have been created, it is a tyrannical State and must be opposed! When, as disciples of Jesus we too "bear witness to the truth", then false claims to represent the truth must be exposed and resisted.

Only in Christ has the Creator, Redeemer and Restorer of humanity, revealed his true purposes for the world.

In his incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended life, the truth of God's merciful and transforming love and his power over affliction, evil and death has been decisively revealed. He alone bears witness to the truth about God and our human calling and destiny.

Today in Australia we urgently need to hear this word. During the last few years Federal, State and Local Governments have been holding a multitude of inquiries into Human Rights and Freedom of Religion. They are rightly concerned to protect

disabled people, women, children and minority groups. But they have also promoted the rights of individuals to choose euthanasia, abortion and same-sex 'marriage', thus trying to curtail the rights of those who oppose such 'rights' on the grounds that they are 'wrongs'.

Underlying much of this political activity is a fierce intolerance towards the truth revealed 'in Christ'. Debunking the truth about God and humanity, and claiming no attachment to ultimate truth, these militant secularists nevertheless exhibit an equally fierce (and absolute) commitment to the truth of relativism. Their argument is powerful, but illogical. Claiming that there is no 'truth' and that everything is 'relative', nevertheless they passionately believe that relativism is absolutely true!

It is a matter of deep regret that many Christian leaders and church members are happy to go along with this apparently more tolerant ideology. They are thus hastening the demise of a church embarrassed about "bearing witness to the truth"

and incapable of standing up for it in the public square.

We must never forget that the Church's primary public task is to preach the good news of Christ "in the world". In his incarnate life, sacrificial death and liberating resurrection there is hope for broken-hearted and arrogant people, irrespective of their political commitments. His Kingdom cannot be manipulated or forced to conform to the demands of political activism (of Left, Right or Centre)! We must de-bunk grossly inflated political expectations, particularly when politicians promise to guarantee our rights, our good health, our safety and our happiness.

We cannot and must not ignore political life, but neither should we mistake it for commitment to the One in whom God's universal mercy and justice have been so magnificently displayed. In his life, death and resurrection the truth about God and humanity has been displayed. This King – unlike all other rulers – has given himself completely and sacrificially in love to forgive sin and defeat the power of evil and death.

IAN CLARKSON

## What did Solomon desire?

Everyone knows King Solomon asked God for wisdom. Actually he didn't.

His request was child-like. Simple, unpretentious, he desired to know God the way his dad, David did. His youthful, Godly passion fired him to know the secrets of the universe—to know the very heart of God—to know the ways of just governance—of himself and of the nation.

He knew his famous father had a heart that pleased God. He wanted that too. In a dream Yahweh said "ask for whatever you want me to give you". A blank cheque from the creator of the universe! And Solomon awoke and asked just this- for "a hearing heart".

The Lord made the offer and that is what out of all heaven and earth's infinite riches Solomon requested—a heart to hear from

God! And that opened the favours of heaven! The Lord gave him great intelligence, intellectual motivation, enormous memory, and a vast capacity to integrate knowledge. Through Solomon's decisions there came phenomenal social benefits; a thoroughly righteous judiciary and legal system, efficient public service, one of the fastest growing economies, foreign policy successes, global trading networks, magnificent agriculture and urban building development and domestic well-being the like history has never before seen.

The nation 'ate and drank and they were happy' is the chroniclers simple summary of Israel's national life. Solomon asked for a heart to hear Yahweh's voice. That's all he wanted. That request turned the key of every door to human  
*continued page 6*

# The UCA's Lottery

*William Robertson comments on a Letter he sent to "Insights" magazine with a response from Rev Harry Herbert*

Today I received by post an "exciting opportunity...to purchase tickets in 'UnitingCare NSW ACT Lucky Draw' LOTTERY" to "win a brand new Toyota Yaris hatch" etc.

How far has the UCA sunk to be now promoting a lottery to get money?

This after reading the Moderator [p2 Insights Sept] "For biblical encouragement 'in how to deal with that which would plunder our morals'".

And "Gideon, with God's guidance was able to show that with faith, courage and ingenuity, it only takes a minority of a minority to restore the

hope of the Community of Faith"

How far has the UCA drifted from its foundations of generosity, self-sacrifice and against gambling?

The biblical tithe is the challenge to give away ten per cent of income.

For me over the years, it is to a range of charities including ARC, Burnside, CBM, LAA, LSF, OF, SF, Uniting World, Wesley Mission, 5 WV children and my local church.

William Robertson Smiths Lake

Insights chose not to publish my letter above, which they referred to Rev Harry Herbert, Executive Director, UnitingCare NSW ACT, who replied to me: "The decision to implement a Lucky Draw was ... with very clear reasoning"

*"Our Lucky Draw helps our*

*organisation beyond raising funds - it serves to educate and engage the wider community about our range of services. We have and will continue to promote the Lucky Draw as an opportunity to support UnitingCare services primarily, with a chance of winning a prize"*

This ignores the fact that though he wrote "funds raised assist vulnerable and disadvantaged people living in our community"; UnitingCare's support of Lucky Draw promotes gambling, and educates and engages people who are vulnerable to the effects of gambling.

We need to restore the Community of UCA and stand against gambling in all forms.

*Rev W.W. Robertson Smiths Lake NSW*

# What did Solomon desire

from page 5 fulfilment and vitality, personal and national. So wonderful these years of rule that Jesus chose Solomon as His comparison.

Like the abundant fruit of our Bible-sourced stable democracies, the fruit of this wisdom was amazing but as time went by it became mesmerising. Solomon looked down upon the peerless bounty (his gold revenue alone was in today's money 950 billion annually) and listened less to the voice of Yahweh he so yearned for as a youth. He accumulated hundreds of live-in

princesses donated by the chiefs and kings of surrounding nations and began listening to their novel ideas about the meaning of the universe and how to communicate with unseen powers. The curiosities buried in the ancient practices of dead and diseased cultures came to intrigue him. His hearing heart simply hardened. Then one day Solomon actually contradicted the once thrilling voice of Yahweh and like a spoilt brat, spat 'no'.

The consequences personally and nationally of one who had known

God but now turns his back were devastating. Personal rights were denied, liberties and freedoms removed as harshness and cruelty flooded into Israel's domestic life through that deep and horrible breach. Finally and because of this Israel forfeited its covenant place. Yet by mercy and its redeemer's godly blood has now transformed into a new Kingdom for all humanity to 'feed on the richest food, to be clothed in salvation and to overflow with joy'. There is no more. Let us guard our hearts to hear!



# Deane Metherringham on Worship

## Our God is a God who talks

**E**verybody worships. There is no human being who does not worship. It may be self-worship, but everybody has an object that they give glory to.

If you go to the Footy at Footy Park here in South Australia, there's the music, there's the singing, there's the awe, there's the cheering, there's the barracking as they try to get a god over the line.

My topic tonight is, what do we expect to happen in worship? Most Uniting Church people don't expect anything that's to happen, unless we get a group of very enthusiastic people to start coming to our church, with plenty of zing and energy, and if they come, they will come, they will make something happen. That would be the answer.

On the other hand, though, in contrast to trying to make something happen, we could expect that the Holy Triune God, which is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in union together, to be present with their people. With people like us, we could expect that God, the name of our God, to actually work with people who, like me, cannot get our act together.

I'm probably the oldest speaker here. Actually I'm a vagabond. I don't know where I live or what I'm doing. I'm still in ministry, so it keeps on going and it's quite a strange thing I actually do. I feel like Abraham. I've got nowhere to live and I don't know where I'm going. And you might think, "Well, sure you don't know where you're going."

We are a people who can't get our act together, and as a minister for those years, I have to say, too, I have not yet got my act together. But we can expect in worship our living God to lift us up out of his sheer goodness, which is grace, his sheer goodness, giving us his own Word and speaking to us, for our God is a God who speaks, giving us, his own song to sing, which he implants in us through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. We can find ourselves spontaneously giving him thanks and praise and bowing down. In the midst of *that* kind of worship, outsiders will come, and experiencing that community of love and fellowship, as Paul says, "They will bow down

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**Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life**

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before God and worship Him declaring, 'Surely God is in this place.'

Karl Barth says, "Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life."

If I answer the question, "What do we expect to happen in Christian worship," my first answer to that would be to receive the worship as a gift from God, to receive worship as a gift.

The verse I want to use comes from Hebrews, Chapter 12. It says there, "Let us have grace," rather than "let us give thanks", "through which we offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and with fear," and then adds, "For indeed our God is a consuming fire."

I'll read it again because my translation, says "Let us give thanks by which we offer to God acceptable worship." That would be okay. However, John Calvin, in doing his exegesis on this passage, saw that in fact it's in the indicative rather than the imperative.

Evangelicals are fabulous at turning indicatives into imperatives. In Romans, Chapter 5, where Paul says, "Since, therefore we're justified by faith, we have peace with God." But I used to go to places where evangelicals would have up on the song sheet at youth meetings, "*Therefore, let us get peace with God.*" So they changed the indicative, a statement of what is true, into an imperative, into something that you have to have. Now, Calvin understood that this verb is in the indicative.

This means that God has given us the gift that enables our worship to flow out of God's goodness rather than from our own inventiveness. Now, at the suggestion that worship is a gift, you may say, "You're not making sense."

Earlier someone spoke at this conference about Geoff

## WORSHIP

Bullock. When I was still working as a mission planner, I did some short-term work at Currumbin Valley, and Geoff Bullock came in to sing. And in the midst of his songs, he told us what had happened to him. He said that at the place where he used to worship, he was the leader and the song leader and all the rest. And he is a gifted musician. So he said, "My understanding of worship was to actually try hard, and if we could make it, we might actually in the music reach out to God." And he said, "I confused the Holy Spirit with an adrenaline rush."

If you live on adrenaline, brothers and sisters, religiously, I can assure you, you'll become depressed. Well, he did.

He dropped into depression. His job couldn't continue. His wife couldn't live with it anymore. He openly confessed his sin, he said, "I committed adultery." And he hit the bottom of the pit. There was nothing there except darkness.

And into the darkness came the Word of God, which is the Word of grace. And so his songs changed. He sang one of them that night about the mercy of God. "It's no longer me trying. I am where I am because God has actually ministered to me." That is the gift of worship.

**J**ust imagine what would happen if you were leading worship, say on Sunday week when you're home, and as the service begins, instead of challenging people to try hard in the service, you suggested to them that Christ is present, that He is there so He can serve you. That in actual fact, He will actually minister to you while you're here and change the way in which we think.

I suggest we do it. You might be then more biblical. You see, Tom Torrance has pointed out something which is very important in his book on preaching Grace and the Apostolic Fathers, he said, "When you talk about the grace of God, and I'll ask you the question, do you see worship as something in which you move closer to God? I hear people utter prayer that says, 'We hope this morning we'll get closer to You.'" Oh, yeah. By incremental steps, you'll eventually make it. Let me ask a question, have you? Have you got there? If you did, have you kept it up?"

"No", Torrance says, "Christian worship and Christian discipleship, it's not about us getting closer to God to get to Him. It's living out of God, which is out of His breath."

God has given us the gift of worship. No other people or religion has that. He's told us what to do, which includes the Lord's Supper, and the traditions which he's given us, and the life of the Spirit, which makes all that living and vital. So that's the first thing to understand. Then what do we expect to happen in worship? First is to be able to receive the gift that God gives us.

Second, we should be able to expect Christ to be present in worship. My friend Pastor John Kleinig retired Lutheran lecturer in Old Testament, some years ago gave us a series of talks on worship. It was a fabulous series.

He told us a story set in the Barossa Valley, where the Lutheran Church has been dominant. A local congregation was coming to its centenary.

So the pastor got them together to discuss how they would celebrate it. In that congregation there were three main families, each with a patriarch, good Germanic stock. Behind the altar, there were three windows, narrow. And one of them had a brain wave and said, "I know what we can do for the centenary. We could take out the plain glass

## Much of our worship takes place as if Jesus is not there. It would be a surprise if He showed up.

and put in three stained-glass windows."

Oh, they thought it would be a fabulous idea. It would be a lasting memento. So they all agreed on that.

Then another person said, "I know what we could put on there. We could take the verse that comes from Matthew 28 on the Resurrection Day, where it says, 'Don't be afraid. He is not here. He is risen.'"

They said, "Yeah, we can put one window, 'Do not be afraid,' next window, 'He is not here,' next window, 'He is risen.'" They decided on that. Then they had the discussion, about what kind of art — contemporary art or traditional art? Well, a big debate got going then. Eventually they decided to have contemporary art in the stained-glass window. So one patriarch said, "No, there's no point in that. We withdraw our dough." So they put it up, "Do not be afraid. He's not here."

That's a true story. Much of our worship takes place as if Jesus is not there.

It would be a surprise if He showed up.

No, I'm not joking. It is a case where they'll go through the same form whether Christ was there or not. So we kind of have worship where we're almost practical atheists.

It's a very important point. The Scriptures say, you know, Jesus is "Where two or three are gathered together, I am in the midst of them." It's in the passive mode.

We turn it around the other way as if we have to do the gathering. No, Jesus says, "Where I have gathered two or three together in my name, I will be in the midst of you."

If we think that worship is following Jesus, then we're living by memory and we're following an example that is the same as the moral-influence theory, and so Jesus is simply a beautiful memory of something that happened in the past. He lived and He died and maybe died for our sins, but all that actually ended when He ascended to heaven, but we're here and we struggle on to do the best we can all by memory.

That is all Schleiermacher, and that is modernism. Schleiermacher was the father of liberal theology. In an attempt to make Christianity relevant to the masses, in the mid-1800s, he said something like this: "Jesus had a consciousness of God. We're human beings. We have a consciousness of God. What does Jesus do about His God consciousness? He serves other people and serves God. If you want to have a God consciousness, then you go out and serve people and follow His example."

You see, if I say worship is a gift, and people say back to me, "Oh, no, that's what we *do*," then I have to tell you only Jesus by His presence gives us access to the Father.

We cannot reduce that. The New Testament is strong on access, a privilege we're given in Christ, to have access to the Father, access to God, into the Holy of Holies. If in Christ we come before God, and then we worship Him and receive from Him all that he actually gives to us.

So if Christ is not present, sisters and brothers, if we operate as if He's not present, then our worship is a waste of time.

No worship committee, no matter how gifted it is, can give you access to God. They may assist in it, but the



## WORSHIP

music cannot ever itself give you access. Jesus Christ, our great high priest, gives us access. He brings us home from the far country to the Father. So when we meet, we don't have to try to get Christ to be present and strain and kind of do things to make it happen.

If we say to people, "No, you don't have to *get* Christ here. He's promised to be here, and He's promised to be here to serve us with God's Word, to serve us with the gift of the Holy Spirit, to serve us with eternal life, to serve us with His own gifts, which is stimulated and inspired by the Holy Spirit," then I tell you, something will be happening in your worship.

What would it be? People might meet God. And as one American theologian has said, "If we had our worship in the right way in our thinking and practice, we wouldn't have to have such an emphasis on evangelism." I agree.

I have to tell you, where the Word of God is coming, where people are sharing in community the wider community actually smells out where there's community. Somehow or another.

**T**hird point, and that is, what do we expect to happen in worship? We should expect Jesus Christ to actually lead our worship.

I heard James Torrance say these things about 20 years ago. He came to South Australia and spoke at our theological college. About four people turned up. It was fabulous, because he said, "No, no, Christ is our high priest. He, not we, leads the worship." It was so free.

In Romans, it talks about Christ constantly interceding or intervening for us or praying for us. Christ prays, and through the Spirit, we're caught up in His prayers. When we come to the Lord's Supper where it says Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me," what brings Christ to your memory? The presence of Christ does. He brings that to our memory through His being there.

So in Hebrews but there are several places where you'll get this reference to Christ being our priest, or high priest. It says that, "Christ is a minister," Chapter 8, Verse 2, "in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord and not any mortal has set up." Ministered there as liturgist, which is public worship.

It's actually saying when we meet, Christ himself leads the worship and the prayers.

Throughout all of His life, Christ offered true worship to God. That culminated in His atoning death, which was to purify our consciences from dead works, meaning dead worship, to worship the living God. His death purifies our conscience because our conscience will never be satisfied, will find no peace, until we know God's conscience is satisfied.

Christ's blood satisfies our conscience because it tells us that God has taken our sins seriously. Because he's taken us and our sins seriously, He's entered. And He's entered because Christ identified Himself with us, and so in dying for us on the cross, as Martin Luther said, become the greatest sinner of all time because He bore the sin of the world and He was of no repute and His divinity was, hidden: no one could recognise it.

There's only one offering that is acceptable to God. It's not ours. It's Christ, and only through Christ can we offer him anything, because he sanctifies the gifts.

When I was a risky mission planner in our rural congre-

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**As James Torrance says, "It's very wearying trying to be God." It's very hard being God, trying to save people. Or get them to people. Only Jesus, you see, can forgive sins. I can't. Not even Max can do that.**

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gations, (city churches would be the same), I discovered that the people are tired and the ministers are train-wrecked. And why is that so? Because in the end, we think that everything depends on us. As James Torrance says, "It's very wearying trying to be God." It's very hard being God, trying to save people. Or get them to people. Only Jesus, you see, can forgive sins. I can't. Not even Max can do that. Even when we wear an alb, which I do, that won't make the forgiveness come any quicker.

Only Christ can forgive your sins. Only Jesus can heal. Only Jesus gives us access to the Father. Only Christ has authority to pour out from the Father the Holy Spirit. So Jesus is not an ideal that we must imitate. When we talk that way, as I said earlier, it's a hangover from the moral-influence theory of liberalism, but evangelicals are as liberal in this as what the liberals are. Hardly any difference. Both groups lead by pragmatism.

So let me quote you from Andrew Purves' "The Crucifixion of Ministry." "God wants to displace our ministries as worship leaders, as preachers. He wants to displace them so that Jesus has the ministry."

Paul says, "I've been crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). In other words, if you are a pastor, God wants to bump you off. If you're a fancy worship leader, you're getting in the way. I've been crucified with Christ, Paul says. That's the end of me.

"Displacement is not an invitation to let Jesus take over by letting Him in on our territory," Purves writes. "Rather, we must be bumped aside firmly, perhaps mortifyingly. Otherwise, we will never let go of our grip on ministries. Why? So that Christ actually has the ministry and we bear witness to Him." So in preaching, I can't save people. The Word of God does not originate in anyone's brain, least of all mine. But as I bear witness to Christ, as we read about Him, read of Him in the Gospel and the Scriptures, as I bear witness to Him in Scriptures, so Christ is present, so Christ speaks, so He heals, so He saves, so He forgives, so He reconciles.

Well, we are all prima donnas. And it's okay. We'll get over it. We're prima donnas, you see, and somehow, because we're extroverts, that is necessary, but our being prima donnas gets in the way. And if you're a song leader--my wife is a musician, and they are prima donnas.

But as you bear witness to Christ and the power of the Spirit and speak of Him so you're able to say, "I know that God is in this place." You can say that. You can say in the midst of this, Jesus remains Lord. He's here to minister to us. I'm telling you today as all priests do, if you look to Him, look up to Him, He'll bring you all of that forgiveness, but He's here to do that.

So, then, if we are to enter into the heart of worship, we have to give Christ His ministry. Let me quote you Karl

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Barth. "Our magnifying of God can only be that of transgressors." Which is you and me. We are transgressors. "Our magnifying of God can only be that of transgressors, and rebels that we are, those who have missed their destiny--"

Some of you are frowning at me. You don't like this, do you? You know, we think we actually are going to do it. We've done it. "I've been going to church for the last 80 years, and I've got it all together." What a sad thing to get toward the end of your life and find that you can't do it. It's better to practice before you get there.

So that's what Barth said, you see. "We've averted and wasted our being, life, and activity. Therefore, our magnifying of God cannot seek and find and have its truth and power in itself but only in God and, therefore, in that one man in whom God is for us who is our peace and salvation. Our faith, therefore, can only be faith in Him and cannot live except from Him as its object."

So worship comes out of faith, which He gives to us, and out of that, we struggle and wobble. But He loves sinners, and for all of us, where still increased, grace abounds all in all. Finally, the God who meets us in worship is, as the text says, "He is a consuming fire." And you said, you probably think I should have said this first rather than the end, but that's the way the writer of Hebrews does it.

When you experience the forgiveness of sins, you not only have relief, but you know you've been in the presence of God and something happens to you. You don't ever, ever, ever forget it. So the God who meets us in worship is a consuming fire, and the phrase "consuming fire" comes from the situation in the Old Testament where it is addressed, really, to Moses from a burning bush and God addresses him as a consuming fire.

Now, the bush is burning but not being consumed, and the scholars tell us the burning bush was Israel and God is present in them. And He gives these people the true worship.

**L**isten carefully. If God did not make known to us His consuming opposition to our perverse, idolatrous, syncretistic worship, how would we ever have fellowship with Him? It's actually good news I'm telling you, not bad news. God does not sit idly by when Christian worship contradicts the Gospel of grace. So when we sing songs and preach, "Try harder, try harder, try harder, and you might one day get it," you're preaching sheer law and the law will actually show you cannot do it and the law will actually disillusion you and you'll crumple. It always does that.

Hopefully tonight, the Lord is driving us to Christ. Because none of it's working. None of our synods really, while we've got some good programs around, if there's no life there, there's no access there, if Christ is not present there, if the Holy Spirit is not at work in that, you could have the best program in the world and all you'd have is a humanistic result.

We're in a lot of pain with our worship. We have all been in congregations where they have worship wars. All the denominations are going through it. And part of the reason we've got the worship wars is because it's all to do with what we want, what we're about, and what we're going to invent and what we're going to do. And then when we don't get what we want or we can't get the worship back to the 1950's glory day-- That day's never going to happen.

God is all the time doing a new thing. He doesn't say, "Go back to the past."

We had an American speaker come to our synod and he went right around Australia and his name I can tell you but I won't put it on the tape, he came at one of our synods after he'd given some studies out of theirs and he said, "I've been to all the synods and presbyteries mostly in Australia, and I notice no one uses the name Jesus." He rebuked us. We were praying to a generic God, and as Calvin and Barth and Bonhoeffer would say to us, "Our God has a name." He's either Abba, Father or Our Lord Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit or the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is our God's name.

Now, we have pain. Is it not the consuming fire at work in us in His mercy? In your congregation? In your conscience? You've had a lot of pain to do it. I know you have. You come on really worked up. Is that because our reactions have defiled the Gospel? Well, our God is a consuming fire and He's not going to give you up easily. He will feel pain. It's the pain of His love, or the wrath of His love, if you like.

So, listen, in His death, Jesus has cleansed us from defiled worship. It's already done. He has endured. He has endured the burning wrath of God in His death on the cross as He took the acting action of our sins in His own body and the act, what that does to Him. That He has done. So that being so, that frees us to turn from false worship because, you see, salvation in the Bible, Old and New Testament, worship and salvation are the one. God saves us from false worship to worship the true living God.

Our evangelical gods are as tight and demanding as Biblical gods. No, once we are evangelicals and we bring in our idols and stuff, we are trapped. And Christ is present here tonight and is speaking to you by my weak, feeble voice, but He's saying to you, you and I can be free of this stuff. And we can go home and not tell the congregation off.

We can go home and say, "This has been a wonderful time. I'm actually free of something that's actually crippled me for the last 10 years, even though I became a Christian 20 years ago." So, you see, are you frustrated, disillusioned, or blind to the horrible situation that we're in? I'm not asking you to adopt a new system of worship, but to entrust yourselves, with me, to the God who has purified you, sanctified you, made you fitting to worship Him. He's the God who makes all things new.

*Let's pray together. Father, it's somewhat late in the evening, but you are present, as you've said and promised. And you have been speaking to us as a group, as a community, as a community but also personally, and, Lord, we have to acknowledge before you that for many of us, we're very tired and we've been very disillusioned and very, very grumpy. Tonight, we want to be able to say, we're not really sure how to say it, but we just want us grown to you, and so, God, help us. Aye, Lord, help us. And do for us what we cannot do for ourselves and we're sick of trying. So our prayer is in Christ's strong name that as He is interceding for us and praying for us and as the Holy Spirit is bringing us new understanding, we pray that we'll turn away from false worship, our idols, and trust no one else but Christ to lead us by His presence, by His word, by the Spirit, so then we'll offer you worship that's acceptable as we receive that great gift from you. We thank you for this now in Christ's name. Amen.*

# Martin Bleby on Worship Singing the Lord's Song

**S**inging is a particularly Christian activity. Go to a wedding or a funeral attended mostly by non-believers, contrast that with one full of believers. The difference in congregational singing is noticeable.

Other people sing—there are lots of secular children's and adults' choirs. But Christians when they come together characteristically like to sing. Maybe because we've got something to sing about.

It has always been so for the people of God, in ways we sometimes overlook:

*David and the chiefs of the service also set apart for the service the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals . . . The number of them along with their brothers, who were trained in singing to the Lord, all who were skillful, was 288 (1 Chron. 25:1, 7 ESV).*

It seems that something like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir was regarded as the norm! There is one memorable musical occasion in the temple when God Himself interrupted the worship:

*And when the priests came out of the Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had consecrated themselves, without regard to their divisions, and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters [that beats 76 trombones!]; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord,*

*"For he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever,"  
the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.  
(2 Chron. 5:11-14).*

When Hezekiah restored the temple worship:  
*he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and of Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was from the Lord through his prophets. The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song to the Lord began also, and the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assem-*




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**The Lord is in His temple  
With all His holy throng:  
Let all the earth keep silence  
To hear the Father-song!  
The song of the beginning,  
The song that's with us now,  
The song that's of the end-time  
When every knee shall bow!**

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*bly worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded. All this continued until the burnt offering was finished. When the offering was finished, the king and all who were present with him bowed themselves and worshiped. And Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped (2 Chron. 29:25-30).*

No wonder the Book of Psalms (the hymn book of the Old Testament) concludes by declaring that God is to be praised on all the musical instruments, and commands: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150).

No less in the New Testament:  
*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col. 3:16).*

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*Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:18-20).*

It is clear here that the singing has something to do with the word and the Spirit. Look at what else it is associated with:

*(Col. 3:12-15).*

It has to do with the peace of Christ, and knowing ourselves as chosen, holy, beloved, forgiven, and living in love. If we were asked, "What is the main presenting issue regarding music in life of your local church?" I expect many would answer: the issue of older hymns and music and newer songs, instruments and musical styles. Is this true?

I suggest there is another more important consideration, which may help to lay that one to rest. We can do this by looking at what the Scriptures call a "new song". This doesn't necessarily have anything to do with novelty. The Psalmist who says, "sing to the Lord a new song" (Ps. 96:1; 98:1), doesn't necessarily mean one written only in the last two years. This newness relates not to novelty but to being renewed.

Note what is said in Psalm 40:1-3:

Here the "new song" (1) follows deliverance; (2) is given by God, from God—it is 'the Lord's song'; (3) it is not just for self-expression, but to gather up others into trusting God. These are the factors that should govern our music in worship.

Nor is this just for the benefit of the local congregation:

*Oh sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth!  
(Ps. 96:1-3).*

Singing in worship is not just self-reinforcing. It has to do with God's salvation for the nations, for all the peoples, for all the earth. So another question we can ask of our singing and music: are we just flying the flag, promoting our little group, reinforcing our brand (of denomination, worship style, or clique), or should there be more to it than that?

Psalm 98 speaks of the "new song" in this way:

*Oh sing to the Lord a new song,  
for he has done marvellous things!*

Again, it is all about God making known His salvation. Certainly it is that "He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel", but in this "he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations", so that "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God". So the whole earth is bidden to join in the song:

Until, finally, the entire creation takes it up, with a view to God's coming judgement and righteousness:

Is this what we are about when we want to "sing a new song"?

In Isaiah 42 we find the same thing:

Here the Gentile nations are specifically included: "the coastlands and their inhabitants . . . the desert and its cities . . . the villages that Kedar inhabits . . . the habitants of Sela sing for joy": (Isa. 42:10-12).

What occasions this? Isa. 42 is where the figure of the Servant of the Lord is introduced. This culminates in Isa. 53, where "he was wounded for our transgressions" (Isa. 53:5). It relates to the work of Christ. This is what the nations are to sing about.

So the "new song" relates to the whole plan of God, and

to God's saving kingdom action, and its marvellous outcome. When that outcome is attained, guess what?

*the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp . . . And they sang a new song:*

*(Rev. 5:9-10, 13).*

They are joined by "a great multitude that no one could number":

*(Rev. 7:9-12).*

Revelation 14:1-3 tells us that this "new song" is sung only by the redeemed, who have come to belong to "the Lamb" and to his Father. So our first priority in renewing our music in worship is to see that the people of our church, and others outside it, are in on God's great action of redemption!

Why? Because it is "the ransomed of the Lord" who "shall return and come to Zion" (Is. 35:10; 51:11).

Then it is that the songs will flow—from the treasure of what is both old and new (Matt. 13:52).

"The Lord's song" that we sing is a song given from the Lord. Zepaniah 3:17 tells us that the Lord Himself actually sings (as recognised in the ABC radio religious music program 'For The God Who Sings!):

Note the elements here. Again it is about the Lord's saving action. In His rejoicing over us "he will quiet you". The Hebrew is simply, "he will be silent". The King James Version translated it, "he will rest in His love". There is a place for that in worship. But also "he will exult over you with loud singing" (For some reason I always imagine Him doing that under the shower!). Hence we are bidden to join Him in this:

*(Zeph. 3:11-13).*

We can trace in Scripture the song of the Lord, right from the time of creation:

*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth  
... when the morning stars sang together  
and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4a, 7)*

No doubt the morning stars and the angelic sons of God were taking their cue from the God who sings. C S Lewis in *The Magician's Nephew* has Aslan singing Narnia into existence.

After the great deliverance at the Red Sea, when Moses and the people of Israel say, "I will sing unto the Lord...", they acknowledge "The Lord is my strength and my song". Miriam and the women join in with dancing.

Psalm 106:10-13 relates this, but also tells us what followed afterwards.

So the Lord also gave Moses another song, the one he sings in Deuteronomy 32. It tells what will happen in the history of Israel as a result of their unfaithfulness.

*(Deut. 32:16-18, 21-22).*

We are told:

*Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua the son of Nun. And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, "Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess." (Deut. 32:44-47).*

So there is another song, not sung by the people of God, but one they must reckon with. It is "the noise of foreigners", coming to conquer them. It is "the song of

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the ruthless” (Isa. 25: 5). It is a reminder of when the Egyptians ‘ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service (Exod. 1:13–14). It is as when “ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves” (Ps. 54:3). It is as when our sin hardens us to become “foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.” (Rom. 1:31).

Even so, God gives a promise.  
(*Jer. 15:21*).

That is why “cities of ruthless nations will fear you”, and “the song of the ruthless is put down” (Isa. 25:3,5). The ruthless have only one song. It is a bitter, carping repetitive drone. And the Lord does something to lay it to rest, and to silence it.

There comes a time when there is nothing to sing about.

(*Isa. 24:4–5*).

All music ceases. There are no more drinking songs.  
(*Isa. 26:8–9*)

But then another sound is heard, in the distance, but clear, getting louder, coming closer. It is not just one song, but many, raised by many voices.

(*Is. 24:14–16*).

These have seen and welcomed the righteous saving ruling action of God. Their song is variegated, and multifaceted—from Hillsong to the Hallelujah chorus—and full-throated in praise and grateful acknowledgement of the glory of God.

It is this reality over which God exults with loud singing (as in Zeph. 3:17). We sing from our hearts made new, but we are simply joining the eternal song that is there from before: the song that God Himself sings, with great delight and exultation, over us whom He has saved.

And here it comes:

(*Isa. 52:7–10*).

When the people of Israel were taken forcibly into exile in Babylon in 586 B.C., they sang a lament. We have it as Psalm 137.

(*Psa. 137:1–2*)

—they were not going to sing any more. Here the song of the ruthless had become a taunt-song (as in Lam. 3:14):

(*Psa. 137:3*).

And they reply plaintively:

(*Psa. 137:4*).

What has happened to reduce them to this terrible disabled muteness? The end of that Psalm tells us.

(*Psa. 137:8–9*).

This is what the Babylonians had done to the Israelites. And if you are wondering what that is doing in the Bible, that is what happens. I was reading the story of Jandamarra, who led the resistance of the Banuba tribe against the occupation of part of the Kimberley region in Western Australia in the 1890s.

The settlers had been lobbying the Western Australian government for a free hand against the indigenous peoples, who by law were supposed to be protected as British subjects, and after a number of incidents, the settlers were given that free hand for a time.

Those who survived the massacre told afterwards of defenceless men, women and children being herded together and shot, and of babies having their heads smashed against the trunk of a tree. When that has happened—as it has in a number of different ways—how can any of us sing the Lord’s song?

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## **The song that is the love-song Of Father and of Son, The song the Spirit renders In hearts that He has won! The Father joys with singing That we to Him belong— Oh, let the earth rejoice in Him And sing the Father-song!**

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And yet the singer of Psalm 137 undergoes, I believe, a change of heart. Even in this appalling situation, the singer hears the approaching songs of the redeemed, and of the Redeemer Himself. After making that plaintive lament, “How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”—which sounds so hopeless—the singer immediately goes on to say.

(*Psa. 137:5–6*).

Jerusalem lies in ruins, but somehow to this singer has come the prophetic promise of the new Jerusalem—not just as a memory, but as that whose coming is so sure that it is worth more than anything else. And if I do not loosen my tongue to sing of it, may it never give utterance again! And if this right hand does not take up the lyre again and strum that song for all it is worth, then let it wither away—as otherwise it surely will.

Some scholars tell us that Israel was still really in exile on the night when a little band of men left an upper room and headed for a garden called Gethsemane. We are told that at that time, they sang. Matthew describes it this way...

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30). This little band was Jesus and his disciples. Jesus was going out to the suffering and death of the cross, and they were going to be scattered in fear and shame. What did they have to sing about? Well, Matthew had just told us some words that Jesus had just said.

(*Matt. 26:26–28*).

The forgiveness of the Babylonians; the forgiveness of the errant and bloodthirsty Israelites; the forgiveness of us. That which alone can still the song of the ruthless. And in the light and power of that, Jesus had gone on to say. (*Matt. 26:29*)

Alive together in the new Jerusalem! That is what they had to sing about, even as they went out into the darkness, where the dark deeds, and the great salvation, would be done.

One translation says “When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives”. It was not just any hymn. We know that at the Passover meal, that they had just had, Psalms 114–118 were sung. So some of the last words they would have sung were these:

(*Psalm 118:14–24*).

That is what the disciples sang with Jesus as the “stone” himself went out to be rejected—to suffer for us “the blast of the ruthless”—and to “become the corner-stone”. And we, in whatever situation we are at any time, can sing that song, and all the songs of the redeemed, with them.

# Charles Wesley's Life, Ministry, Letters and Hymns

Perry Smith on a man and his hymnody

**C**harles Wesley was born in 1707 and died at 80 in 1788, being the 18th child of the 19 children of Susannah Wesley. Only 10 survived to adulthood—and there was no Government Child Allowance then! Susannah had a passion for learning and especially for languages, being fluent in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. When only 19 she married Samuel Wesley, the Vicar of Epworth in Lincolnshire in 1688. She was brilliant and could debate issues of theology with theological students. Though such a busy wife and the mother of 13 growing children, she worked tirelessly for the poor and needy, and still set herself 2 hours daily for prayer and Bible study and in her 70s stood beside her son John as he preached to thousands.

Charles' brother John Wesley, born in 1703 was 4½ years younger than Charles. I don't advocate large families to bring about revival, but without that large family and without the rescue from their father's burning rectory set on fire by aggressive parishioners, there would have been no Spiritual Revival bringing thousands into the Kingdom. Methodism was a vibrant movement within the Anglican Church, before becoming a separate denomination, and according to expert historians, the Methodist revival saved England from the equivalent of a French Revolution.

At 8 years old, Charles went to the Westminster Abbey School later becoming School Captain, then to Oxford University in 1726. The following year he started the "Holy Club" for mutual study, the devotional disciplines of prayer and fasting, and for social caring, being dubbed as "Methodists", a nickname for their

disciplined lives. John later became the leader and like John earlier, Charles was ordained as an Anglican clergyman to be a missionary in American Georgia, which proved a failure. John said "I came to convert the natives, but O who will convert me?" Charles returned to England with ill health and John followed later. That led in 1738 to Charles' true conversion and to John's three days later on May 24th 1738. It was still celebrated in British Methodism as "Wesley Day" as I grew up there.

Some hymns of Charles were short with only 4 verses but others had 20 or 30 verses, some being composed on horseback as he travelled to preach.

On returning from their failed missionary service in Georgia, the brothers were influenced by Moravian Christians who emphasised their radiant assurance through personal faith in Christ. They were so calm in their faith during severe storms at sea on the returning voyage, that really impressed the Wesleys.

The Wesleys were further challenged by Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians, which emphasised the personal pronouns as in Galatians 2:20 "Faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me". Charles' conversion was on Pentecost Sunday 1738, just before John's conversion on Wednesday, and his poetic gift burst forth. Two days afterwards he wrote his hymn "Where shall my wondering soul begin?" (1933 Edition of Methodist Hymn Book (MHB), No. 361) which Charles and his brother John, sang together.

That began his preaching of the Gospel in song! His later hymn "And can it be" (MHB 371 and Together In Song (TiS) 209) clearly celebrates his conversion, stressing the personal pronouns "Died He for me who

caused His pain - for me who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?... my chains fell off, my heart was free". "Jesus and all in Him is mine" is possibly his boldest hymn line ever, in that final verse which ends, "Bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ my own". His familiar hymn "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise" (MHB 1 and TiS 210) was his constant attitude of gratitude in celebrating his Saviour, aspiring to a thousand tongues rather than just one! His partnership with John in passionate evangelism was amazing, preaching to thousands in the open air—with no p.a. system then.

They both faced strong physical opposition from angry mobs and even hostile clergy. He had a tender, pastoral heart, not only leading people to Christ, but building them up in their faith, helping them through problems, troubles, backsliding and restoration. He ministered to people in many needs, even sharing the Gospel on their death-beds to be sure of heaven. He visited Newgate Prison to share the Gospel with prisoners, some being sentenced to death, and led many to Christ who then calmly moved to their execution.

His letters often included poetry and hymns suited to his readers, though he was not as systematic as his brother John. My most treasured books have been 14 volumes of "Wesley's Works" containing John Wesley's Short Grammars of English, French, Latin, Hebrew and Greek languages, masses of his sermons, letters and articles on many themes.

Charles' letters are very revealing, though not all are preserved or fully understood, because he used a kind of shorthand, abbreviations, strange

# WORSHIP

endings, only part-signatures or initials and often no date.

His romantic courtship and marriage to Sally Gwynne occurred in 1749 when he was 46 and she was 27, and his brother John married them. It was love at first sight! He wrote to her before their marriage "You have heard me acknowledge that at first sight my soul seemed pleased to take acquaintance with thee, and never have I found such a nearness to any fellow-creature as to you. O may it bring us nearer and nearer to God, till we are both swallowed up in the immensity of His love!"

As their marriage approached he wrote one evening, "It is late, but I know not how to leave off, my heart so overflows with love toward you. ... To His everlasting arms I commit you this night". The very next day he wrote, "There is no end of my letter, or of my love which dictates it."

He wrote to a friend after marriage, "My Dear Friend, pray for me. I want your prayers rather than your congratulations. Yet I believe God has lent me a great blessing this day and that I ought to be thankful and employ every moment to His glory".

He quoted to a friend a Wedding Hymn that he wrote to sing at the altar. I also found a 1st Wedding Anniversary Hymn, verse 2 declaring "My grateful heart to Him I lift, who did the guardian angel send, enriched me with a heavenly gift, and blessed me with a bosom friend".

Charles had a wonderful marriage, losing some children with smallpox, but they had surviving sons and just one surviving daughter, Like his mother Susannah Wesley, he gave evening time when possible to share with each of his children, especially his daughter. His discipline was rather strong, but with a tender bond. At the end of his life, they held hands as he died and went to heaven.

In his 6,000 hymns note the varied metres and sometimes quaint rhyming of his day (like join and divine etc). He used some strange words of his time now changed in meaning, and unusual accents of words to fit the cadence of the lines.

Joy certainly breaks through in many hymns like "My God I am Thine; what a comfort divine, what a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine!... 'Tis life everlasting, 'tis heaven below", heaven being anticipated before heaven above (MHB 406). The tunes sometimes match

## **He constantly spreads the Gospel challenge to others as in MHB 173 "That every fallen soul of man may taste the grace that found out me; that all mankind with me may prove Thy sovereign everlasting love".**

the emotions as in that hymn, often being similar to the merry, secular music of the day, prompting a dance. Notice the line "My heart it doth dance at the sound of His Name!"

I must confess that I miss the nourishing, Scriptural teaching of Wesley's hymns. My search has just revealed that the old MHB has 263 hymns by Charles Wesley, but our current "Together in Song" only has 41. Charles was certainly "a man of one book", a phrase by which his brother John was recognised. His hymns are steeped in Bible allusions, like the old King James translation being versified.

Some hymns seem like a sermon outlined as MHB 77 and TiS 122 based on Ephesians 3:18-19 "What shall I do my God to love?" There is an introductory verse, then a breaking up of the text point by point in verse by verse, and a concluding verse of challenge and response. Grasp the amazing scope of his hymns in Scriptural, theological, experimental and personal themes, revealing his own personal faith as in MHB 270/TiS 214, "My heart is full of Christ and longs its glorious matter to declare". He constantly spreads the Gospel challenge to others as in MHB 92 and TiS 218, "Jesus, the Name high over all... O for a trumpet voice... O that the world might taste and see the riches of His grace", and in MHB 173 ending "That every fallen soul of man may taste the grace that found out me; that all mankind with me may prove Thy sovereign everlasting love".

There's no nominal Christianity there! His brother John warned people against nominal Christianity, saying "May the Lord God of my fathers save me from such a poor,

starved religion as that!" Note also Charles' range of subjects, covering the general love of God and our Christian seasons: Advent - "Come Thou long expected Jesus"; Incarnation - "Hark! The herald angels sing"; Atoning Death of Jesus - "For ever here my rest shall be... This all my hope and all my plea, for me the Saviour died; Resurrection - "Christ the Lord is risen today, Hallelujah! Ascension - "Hail the day that sees Him rise";

Heavenly Priesthood - "Entered the holy place above"; and the Second Coming - "Lo He comes, with clouds descending". Also note his emphasis on the Holy Spirit as in MHB 78, "Away with our fears... The Spirit is come, the witness of Jesus returned to His home"; and the Trinity as in MHB 39, verse by verse, "Father, in whom we live... Incarnate Deity... Spirit of Holiness... Eternal, Triune Lord".

The full Christian Life is covered in so many aspects: faith and regeneration, the new birth, discipleship, growth, fellowship, holiness (rarely heard and preached today), comfort, encouragement, and even daily work in MHB 590 and TiS 571, "Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I go, my daily labour to pursue, Thee, only Thee, resolved to know in all I think, or speak, or do". We see his emphasis on Holy Communion as in MHB 761 and TiS 508, "Jesus we thus obey Thy last and kindest word" and the Church in its various aspects, militant and triumphant.

There are even hymns for backsliders (a word not heard today). In my 1779 Edition they are headed: "For Persons Convinced of Backsliding" and "For Backsliders Recovered". Finally death, judgement and eternal life are covered, with heaven assured to born again, believing Christians.

Someone commented that so many of his hymns end up in heaven, like MHB 606 ending "Our all in all is He... and then in heaven our journey ends". I end with his comment that with all his travelling Gospel preaching, he sometimes longed for a quiet country parish to read, study and really care for his people, especially when his health at times was a concern and burden. Finally, unafraid and confident, he slipped away to heaven, His earthly journey and amazing ministry ended.

*Rev Perry Smith continues to serve the wider church in the Hunter region of NSW.*

# Marriage and the pursuit of

*Review of "Maybe I do: Modern marriage and the pursuit of happiness" by Kevin Andrews*

**K**evin Andrews, Shadow Minister for Families, devout catholic and a long-time marriage educator, has taken on a huge task in seeking to provide a review of the literature on marriage, and the ways in which the changing status of marriage and family is affecting both adults and children, particularly our children. He has not only taken on a mammoth task, he has also taken on an unpopular task. As I have found in my own work, people do not want to hear that a stable nuclear family is the best environment for children – and for adults for that matter. Such claims are seen in today's political climate as discriminatory, insensitive, inappropriate and politically incorrect. And it doesn't seem to matter that a huge amount of research supports the importance of the nuclear family.

This book of 354 pages plus over a hundred pages of appendices and useful summaries, is divided into four main parts: I Marriage Matters, II The New Culture, III Maybe I Do: The Retreat from Marriage and IV Restoring a Marriage and Family Culture. In Part I, the emphasis is on showing that "a healthy stable and happy marriage is an optimal relationship for the psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing of adults and children" (p.1).

The chapters in this first section focus on four areas: (a) surveys of attitudes to marriage, (b) the positive effects of a happy marriage on the adults involved, (c) the protective effects of a stable, healthy marriage and the negative effects of marital disruption on children, and (d) the positive effects for the society of happy, healthy marriages. The research shows that attitudes to marriage are still generally positive even among young people, who generally hope to marry and have children and believe that children should ideally be brought up by their own parents. The positive effects of stable marriages on both those involved and the society in general are emphasized, including the positive implications for the economy for both the individual family and the larger society.

The two chapters in the second section focus on the new culture created by changes in attitudes to marriage and to the laws surrounding marriage and family. In the first chapter in this section, Andrews deals with the strong emphasis on individualism that makes it difficult for people to get on together, and the philosophical attacks on marriage that have taken place, citing such authors as Foucault, Derrida, Giddens and others. He also argues that instability tends to create greater instability because leads to an unwillingness to fully commit when divorce is a real possibility. Changes in gender roles and relations are also seen as relevant.

In the next chapter, the historical position of marriage over the centuries is discussed with the conclusion that society is tending to change marriage from a responsible



relationship that includes care for one's own children to an affectionate sexual relationship that focuses primarily on the immediate needs of the adults. There is also discussion of no-fault divorce laws and other changes such as the development of covenant marriage in the USA, particularly aimed at couples who believe in commitment and the permanence of marriage.

Attempts in other countries to strengthen marriage and reduce the negative consequences of marital breakdown are also discussed.

**T**he section titled "The Retreat from Marriage" provides a mass of statistical data about the changes in marriage and family formation over the last forty years or so across ten countries, including Australia. For example, people are marrying less, marrying later, more likely to cohabit before marriage, more likely to divorce, less likely to remarry, and likely to have fewer children than was true in the past. In addition, there has been a large increase in ex-nuptial births and in single-parent families. The causes and consequences of these changing patterns are discussed in detail.

The second chapter in this section focuses on the romantic notion that every person has a soul-mate waiting for them somewhere who just needs to be found. I tend to call this illusion the Hollywood effect. This emphasis is seen as contributing to the increase in cohabitation, as well as to high levels of instability as individuals seek to find their own soul-mate. Data are presented indicating the difficulties that current "emerging adults" have with maintaining commitment in relationships. In addition, public opinion tends to support the 'benefits' of cohabitation as a good test of the suitability of a partner for marriage although the research does not support such a conclusion. The difficulties that males, in particular, have in committing themselves to marriage are also discussed. In the third chapter in this section, the focus is on the way that family structure affects social inequality.

In the fourth section of this volume, Andrews discusses the potential for rebuilding a culture of marriage in the context of all the changes reported so far, showing that current trends negatively affect families, and particularly children.

In the second chapter in this section, Andrews describes the changes that have occurred among family scholars, with a developing consensus that stable families are important for the stability of society and that the current culture involving high levels of divorce and



# Happiness

nonmarital childbearing is not really sustainable. He also discusses four 'modest' goals for governments: to develop an explicit family policy, encourage at least a replacement birth rate, provide inducements for increasing marital permanency and the consequent improved welfare of children through education and other programs, and valuing family stability and reinforcing the responsibility that parents have for the children they produce.

In the final chapter, Andrews discusses the modern dilemma, particularly for women, in trying to find "a workable balance" between the ideals of equality and freedom, and the reality of caring for a family. He claims that women have, at least to some extent, been duped into thinking that they can have it all. He also discusses a number of myths that are generally accepted in the community but that make having a happy and stable mar-

riage more difficult. Examples include "Conflict destroys marriage", the skills needed for marriage come naturally so there is nothing to learn and "A good divorce is beneficial for children". He finishes by outlining the characteristics that social scientists tend to see as necessary for a successful marriage. There is nothing new about such characteristics as generosity, commitment, responsibility, loyalty, patience and kindness.

This book contains a lot of important data about marriage and family. It is not, I should emphasize, the kind of book that one reads for half an hour before going to sleep. It is, however, a very important resource for those who work with families or for those who need convincing that a stable nuclear family is the best environment for raising children, even in the 21st century.

*Patricia Noller is Secretary of the ACC Qld Movement.*

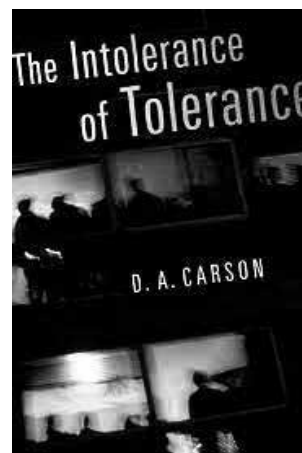
# The Intolerance of Tolerance

*Review of "The Intolerance of Tolerance" by Don Carson*

**I**n our increasingly secular society, any religious viewpoint offered as a contribution to public discourse is regularly dismissed as irrelevant. The Christian voice in particular has little or no place in the public square. To some extent the church has only itself to blame given, for example, its widespread loss of integrity as a result of ubiquitous, institutional abuse. The muting of the Christian voice however is not to be explained solely by the church's stained reputation; there are other disturbing and relentless trends in our culture that we ignore at our peril.

All this makes Don Carson's recently published book, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Eerdmans 2012) so very timely; it speaks to our situation. In 8 brief chapters (176 pages) and with his usual sharp insight, Carson offers a sobering analysis of the society in which we seek to live out and speak out our faith. Citing example after example, Carson observes the demise of the 'old' tolerance—I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it, claiming, ironically and rightly it seems to me, that in the name of tolerance, intolerance in our society is increasingly being imposed. Carson surveys the current state of affairs with examples from business, medicine, education, the media and government. He offers some jottings on the History of Tolerance, noting, among other things, that while in pagan Rome intolerance was a virtue, the church, sadly, in various eras was no stranger to intolerance. His reflections on the separation of church and state are helpful as he notes the incessant pressure to restrict religion to the private sphere.

In Chapter 6, And Still There is Evil, Carson describes the 'new' tolerance as nestled into some vision of truth largely shared by the culture or at least by the cultural elites. The issue then becomes what breaches of that



vision can be tolerated...

(p.127) He goes on to discuss the most striking test case – homosexuality.

Carson's final chapter consists of Ten 'Words', the ninth being Prepare to Suffer where he touches on legislation that threatens the right of a Christian institution to hire and fire staff on the basis of their commitment or otherwise to beliefs and lifestyle consistent with the ethos of the institution. Here Carson draws a line in the sand.

Were such prosecution/persecution to occur, we would gladly bear it, and learn a little better how to do evangelism in prison. (p.176). His comments beg the question where we will, when necessary, draw a line in the sand.

Carson's tenth and final 'Word' is worth quoting in full – Delight in God, and trust him. God remains sovereign, wise and good. Our ultimate confidence is not in any government or party, still less in our ability to mould the culture in which we live. God may bring about changes that reflect the more robust understanding of tolerance better known in earlier times, and that would be very helpful; alternatively, he may send 'a powerful delusion so that (people) will believe a lie' (2 Thessalonians 2:11), and in consequence we may enter into more suffering for Jesus than the West has known for some time. That would have the effect of aligning us with brothers and sisters in Christ in other parts of the world, and enable us to share something of the apostles' joy (Acts 5:41).

*George Glanville is an ACC member residing in the Blue Mountains and a former Principal of Tyndale Christian School.*

# Red to White

Les Knowing  
1923-2013

*ACC records its thanks for the life of Les Knowing, who died in Adelaide on 8 January 2013. Our prayers and sympathy are with Joan and family at this time. Les had been actively involved in supporting reform and renewal movements including EMU and at the time of his death was the SA ACC Convenor, helping significantly with the 2012 ACC Adelaide conference. Les had earlier submitted his testimony for publication and ACCatalyst believes Les's story is a wonderful recognition of his desire to always give the glory to his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Being ordinary I guess, is the lot of most people—do you agree? And so, I fit comfortably into that mould, but possibly a little more reticent.

My parents were keen for my welfare and so in my very early years I attended the then Alberton East Baptist Sunday School where I tasted care and the validity and strength of the Christian faith.

It was seen advisable, according to our family Doctor that due to my sister's illness as an infant that we move to somewhere near the sea—this proved to be Semaphore. It was frightening to think of restarting attending Sunday School, but this is where God shows his hand in providing a Christian family with whom I soon began to relate and appreciate.

Their children were my age and I could feel the whole family enfolding me. Sunday evenings after church around the piano, singing 'Build on the Rock' etc. and then supper—what a great time.

It was an era prior to the 'Call to the Nation' and the Billy Graham Crusade when we were privileged to have the ministry of godly men like J. Edwin Orr, Brindley Evans and others, mostly from America. They presented the challenge of the Gospel and it was on a June night in c.1937 that I opened the eyes and ears of my heart to the lovely

message of salvation through Jesus. Brindley Evans was speaking—the story you possibly know quite well—how in the land of Egypt, the 'Angel of Death' visited the land and the first born of each Egyptian family was taken, but the Hebrew people were saved. Such a momentous event, why and how did it happen?

The Hebrew people had worked so hard under Pharaoh for many years it was time to move on, but Pharaoh wasn't co-operating. God, through Moses sent at least ten plagues to get Pharaoh to relent. The last plague was the taking of the first born of every Egyptian family and of the cattle, read Exodus Chapters 7–11. How were the Hebrews saved?

They obeyed God's instructions, Exodus Ch. 12. —God's instructions were for each family to select a male lamb or goat, perfect and one year old. At a specific time, these animals were to be slaughtered, roasted and eaten entirely, any leftovers to be burnt.

It is encouraging to hear God say that if the animal was too large for the family, it was to be shared with the neighbours. The essence of the happening was that the blood of this animal was to be wiped (sprinkled) on the lintel and doorposts of each Hebrew house—why? Because God had a plan. The very same night God would allow an 'Angel of Death' to pass throughout the whole of Egypt to kill all the first born of every family except those which were marked by the blood, that is the Hebrew families were not troubled, but the Egyptian families suffered this great calamity and heart break. Verse 30 of Chapter 12 gives us a picture, as it says there was loud wailing.

Can you now come with me as we mingle with the crowd on the day that Jesus was crucified? Look at your hands, sweaty, and a little dirty perhaps—look at his, there is blood trickling down. Look at your feet, definitely dirty as you moved along the Via Dolorosa—look at his, bent and twisted backwards against the pressure of the nail, there's blood trickling down. Feel your head as you wipe away the sweat—look at his,



punctured by the thorns of a mock crown, there's blood trickling down.

Please match the situations and provide your own interpretation.

(a) There had to be a sacrifice without blemish.

(b) The blood of the sacrifice was an integral and vital part of God's plan.

(c) Consider the consequence of applying or not applying the blood.

(d) Consider a faith that can override the apparent intellectual folly of such happenings.

(e) Consider the deep love behind the words of Jesus "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"

There is a requirement of Christians to constantly celebrate the "Passover" as in Exodus Chapter 12, Vs 14 and 17. This we do in our Communion and Eucharist services which combine the heartbeat of these two earth-moving happenings.

I say right here and now that I have applied the blood of the Lamb without blemish, Jesus, to the door posts and lintel of my heart. I give evidence to a.b.c.d.e. above. If today you are looking further and for greater things in your life—here is your answer. Being a Christian is not really hard, it is just unworldly! As a family is enhanced by the closeness of its members, so our lives are embraced by God as we consider him as Father, Jesus as our Brother, and the Holy Spirit as our ever loving companion on life's journey.

Now for a surprise—my decision as 74 years ago—"get a bit modern you say". It is modern, because God's love is never out of date. Our sins are washed away if we believe and accept this friend/brother into our lives and we become 'whiter than snow'

Don't be afraid of doubts, there will be many questions—God will provide in his time. Would you like to be a RED to WHITE person!?

# THIS IS THE ACC

## 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 *ACC Catalyst* and local newsletters.

## What does ACC do to help you?

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers to

- grow in their faith and be active in prayer, worship and fellowship
- share their faith and respond to current issues in the church and the world
- develop their congregations as vibrant expressions of the Good News.
- experience God's Word in action through healing broken lives and reconciling relationships.

## What we want to do

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;

- calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution;

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

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

- 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

Please consider joining the ACC.

Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$35.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$60.00 p.a

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: [accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com) mail:

PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

## What happens next

- March 12-13, 2013: National Council and Commissions Sydney Gathering.
- March 15-17: ACC Coonabarabran (NSW) visit
- April 12-14: ACC Southern Queensland Visitation

## ACC Resources List

All ACC resources (except the DVD resources) are available on the ACC Website: [www.confessingcongregations.com](http://www.confessingcongregations.com)

A selection of ACC DVD and video resources including the 2012 Conference presentations are available on vimeo; eg., Max Champion introducing the ACC: <http://vimeo.com/53983980> A limited range of earlier material is still published in Disc form, and all ACC Congregations have received ACC DVD resource material for their use.

### Founding Documents

The Charter (2006)

Statement on Sexuality (2006)

Confessing Statement from the Executives of the Reforming Alliance and Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church (EMU) (2006)

### ACC Brochures and Statements

ACC Vision and Goals 2007-2017 (2008)

Cross Cultural Commission Statement (2008)

The Church's Social Responsibility (2008)

Theological Declaration (2008)

Theological Declaration: Commentary and Study Guide (2009)

Abortion in the Australian Community (2010)

A Christian Response to Euthanasia and Medically Assisted Suicide (2011)

Marriage: An ACC Statement (2011)

### Bible Studies

Bible Study: Mark ISBN 978-0-9804493-0-3

Bible Study: Galatians ISBN 978-0-9804493-1-0

Faith That Works: Studies in the Letter of James ACC Bible Study No.

3. Brian Edgar (2008) ISBN 978-0-9804493-2-7

### DVD Resources

Conversations Series

No. 1 Conversations in Discipleship and Evangelism: A Study Guide with DVD (2010) ISBN 978-0-9804493-3-4

No. 2 The Hope of a New Heaven and New Earth: A Study Guide with DVD (2011) ISBN 978-0-9804493-6-5

No. 3 This is Love: A Study Guide with DVD (2012) ISBN 978-0-9804493-8-9

### Devotional Booklets

Seeds For Harvesting Vol. 1 (2011)

- Rev Robert Imms ISBN 978-0-9804493-5-8

Seeds For Harvesting Vol. 2 (2012)

- Rev Robert Imms ISBN 978-0-9804493-7-2



The young Billy Graham played by Armie Hammer

## Pastors on film

### **Billy: The Early Years** (2008, M)

While made a few years back, this film has only recently made it to DVD in Australia. I should note (as the credits also record), this film was not made by the Billy Graham Organisation and is not endorsed by it, though one of Billy's daughters, Virginia, has spoken fondly about it.

It is nostalgic in a good way for a different era, though sometimes the abundant sentimentality may not allow deep critical reflection. It is also a romantic drama with a key focus on the development of the relationship between Billy and Ruth Bell.

Billy is brought to life by Armie Hammer, who had a significant role as the Winklevoss twins in the recent film about Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg *The Social Network*. He is perhaps sometimes a little too 'nerdy' or earnest, but that may be an attempt to reflect the idea that this was a gentler and idealistic American Christian period. The film helpfully illustrates some of the important characteristics of Billy Graham and the ministry he founded, and contrasts the call on his life as an evangelist with that of his former colleague Charles Templeton, an evangelist who eventually left his calling after having co-founded Youth for Christ International with Torrey Johnston. Templeton continued to speak highly of Billy though he viewed his faith as too simple. The film ends with a striking scene illustrating the important setting of the Los Angeles Crusade in

1949 and leaving a foundation for the significant growth in the 1950s, with Billy Graham continuing to preach the 'simple' message of faith in Christ.

### **The Holy Roller** (2010 PG)

This romantic Christian comedy with a touch of drama has many homage elements. It is based on a story by Australian actor Angus Benfield, who plays the lead role and was made in New Zealand before the Christchurch earthquake. The story revolves around struggling Pastor Luke who heads for the big city, and finds a range of sinners and temptation, and yet also miracles. He inadvertently helps the owner of a nightclub aptly named Temple and then sets up a church. Issues abound as he attracts many similar people Christ did in his ministry. Some scenes are reminiscent of the well-used discussion film *Jesus of Montreal* (1989) and also *Pray TV*, the 1982 John Ritter film, which contrasts the personal style of pastoral connection with the tele-evangelist role so often seen in the USA, and in this movie through the appropriately named Reverend Shoebuck. The Da Vinci Last Supper image is also worth considering. A strength in the film is the music, led by the other major character Kate (Victoria Abbott), and also promoted as a key element in the development of the church. While the 'nerdy' pastor is sometimes a little perhaps too deliberately cringe-worthy, this is mostly a warm-hearted film exploring

some of the essentials of the Christian faith in belief and practice and helps Christians to consider their motives and actions.

### **The Sessions** (2012, MA)

This film doing the rounds in some religious and secular religious circles is one to consider with caution. Most of its interest has been because of the priest character and his seeming liberal attitudes regarding sexual practice. I found it less than heart-warming and mystifying as to why many film critics have lauded it, except for the way it tries to tug the heart-strings and promotes our individualistic culture. The film centres around the true story of American writer and poet Mark O'Brien, who due to polio breathed with an iron lung for most of his life. Mark has a desire to lose his virginity before his life (his life is remarkably precarious) and seeks a "sexual surrogate". One of the main persons he consults about this is a priest Father Brendan (played by William H. Macy) who portrays one of the most ridiculous figures I have seen in films. Many critics have praised his seeming humanness and accessible character, while I saw him simply as a blithering idiot who seemingly has no idea of the faith of the church and a theology of the body, let alone common sensibilities. Even if there are physical limitations his confidential counselling with Mark in common areas of the church where other people are listening in and in one case comment via their looks is truly stupid. The film needed a more robust depiction or perhaps cutting the character out completely.

Two other aspects stood out for me. Its contemporary focus on the idea that the sex act is a pinnacle of achievement, and central to being (notwithstanding this person is disabled and the issues this has raises for sexual expression), and secondly the intriguing bonding that occurs in a very short space of time with Mark's sexual surrogate, played by Oscar winning actress Helen Hunt. What does this actually say about the theology of the body—the bonding provided by sex and what was the film trying to say? Anyway, one to note when you see reference, but also to avoid viewing.

*Peter Bentley is Executive officer of ACC*