

ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

A portrait of John Wesley, an 18th-century English Methodist preacher. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark academic or clerical robe with a white cravat. He has long, wavy white hair and is looking slightly to his left. His right hand is raised in a gesture, palm facing up, while his left hand rests on an open book. The background is dark and indistinct.

GLEN
O'BRIEN

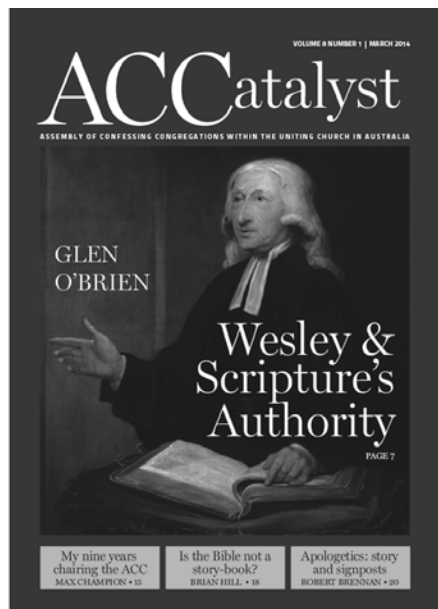
Wesley & Scripture's Authority

PAGE 7

My nine years
chairing the ACC
MAX CHAMPION • 15

Is the Bible not a
story-book?
BRIAN HILL • 18

Apologetics: story
and signposts
ROBERT BRENNAN • 20



John Wesley, National Portrait Gallery, London

EDITORIAL

Well worth ploughing

On our letters page in this issue is a brutally honest review of *ACCCatalyst*. Some of our articles “are a real plough” but they have “hidden gems”. We’ll take their comment in the spirit in which it was meant—the writer goes on to compliment Rod James’ writing on Marriage.

We hope this edition is worth hitching up the plough and dragging

a furrow across the pages. The cover story is really worth a go, for example. It’s quite controversial in fact. Has Glen O’Brien got the doctrine of Scripture right? And what about his views on salvation?

These are great topics. Please be sure to tell us what you think of the O’Brien paper.

John Sandeman

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Tangleword and Internet friends

Last night I was on the internet and got onto a favourite website of mine from a few years ago. Back then, I was into internet Tangleword. Tangleword was a word game. It’s like Boggle and you play against people from all over the world. In between games you chat with the other players.

There was a group of us who often used to be on at the same time, so we got to chat fairly often. We would discuss each other’s personal problems and we became friends—sort of. Of course when you are chatting to people on the internet, they can’t see you, you can remain anonymous. You can lie about who you are and no one will find out. It’s a very safe way to make friends, because you don’t have to open up and make yourself vulnerable.

But it does not really compare to true friendship, because in true friendship, people know all of your weaknesses and the things you would prefer to hide, and they love you anyway. With internet friendships, people only find out what you want them to find out.

As humans, what we desire is real friendships, where we can be ourselves and feel safe and loved without having to pretend to be

Hilary Sandeman



something we are not, and without having to hide our faults. The reason we desire those kind of friendships is because that is how God made us - to relate to one another and to him.

But we can treat God as if he’s on a distant computer at the other end of a long phone line. We tell him what we think he wants to hear and we only let him into the parts of our lives that we think he will approve of. But that kind of relationship will never quite satisfy us. That’s not a true relationship with God. God wants to be a part of all of our lives. He wants us to make ourselves vulnerable to him. He wants to love

us despite all of our weaknesses and shortcomings.

He wants to be a part of our most painful memories, and our greatest shame. He wants to be a part of the good times. That’s true friendship, and God’s friendship is the best there is. Whether we know him from a distance or know him up close is our choice to make.

But once we know God as a close and intimate friend, we will never want to go back to knowing him at a distance, because that will only ever be a poor substitute for the real thing.

Robyn



Part of the Cranbourne Cluster enjoyed a “delicious meeting” at the Yarra Valley Chocolaterie and Ice creamery recently. L to R Rev Ted Curnow, Susanne White, Rev Malcolm White, Beryl Curnow, Annette Blaze, Rev John Blaze.

Uniting in prayer

On the 15th-17th November Uniting Prayer and Fasting had its first prayer rally at Merroo Kurrajong NSW. About 40 people, full time and part time, from 4 different Uniting Churches gathered together to pray. We prayed for the Assembly Standing Committee that was meeting at this time. We also prayed for forgiveness and renewal, repentance and revival in Jesus' name beginning in our own lives, families, church (local and national), workplace, town, city, region, country and the world.

The theme for the prayer rally was “Loving One Another”. This theme was developed by the Uniting Church President Elect, Stuart McMillan. He writes: “We have been made one in Christ, that’s done. However we struggle to love one another as Jesus commands us. Paul in Romans 12:5 notes that we belong to each other. Our church has some very difficult relational matters happening. Let us cry out to God asking for forgiveness and for renewal. I Really appreciate your commitment to prayer, to the heart of God for our church and our nation.”

We had prayer sessions that coincided with the Assembly Standing Committee meetings. Each session contained praise, prayer and the word around the theme of loving one another. Over the course of the weekend, we used a map of Australia in our prayers. We added flames of fire to symbolize prayers for revival.

During 2014 there will be three prayer rallies held at the same time as the Assembly Standing Committee meetings. They are

- 20th-22nd March at Merroo Kurrajong NSW with a focus on prayer for the indigenous people of Australia.

- 18th – 20th July in Adelaide. Venue TBA.

- 14th-17th November at Merroo Kurrajong, NSW.

Rev Anne Hibbard
Coordinator of Uniting Prayer and Fasting.
www.unitingprayerandfasting.com

Refreshed at Evergreen

Early in 2013 ACC NSW was approached by the Rev'd Steve Everist of Pittwater UC, Sydney and member of the EL250 Network in the UCA, with the idea to co-host a one day workshop for church leaders, lay and ordained, focusing on refreshment, renewal, evangelism and church growth.

Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.
(Psalm 92:13-14)

Subsequently, Evergreen 1 was held at Pittwater UC with about 30 people in attendance, many from ACC Congregations, with other congregations were represented as well. The attendance also included an ordained Synod staff member!

The day included:

- worship with the leadership of the Pittwater UC worship team
 - explanation of the concept of refreshing church leaders for evangelism
 - Reflection on Psalm 92 – worship leads to refreshment leads to evangelism
 - Input from keynote speaker Rev'd Phil Pynor from Seeds UC SA (formerly known as Aberfoyle Park UC), who did more of a facilitation of discussion than give a lecture.
 - Q&A Forum with Phil Pynor and Rev'd Nigel Rogers (Pittwater UC's senior minister).
- Phil Pynor led us through some concepts of and discussion on:
- Gospel witness, living transformed lives in public view, engaging with

community;

- what it means for God to “prune the vine” (John 15), taking risks, doing things differently;
- the core ministry of discipleship, a Disciple>Send>Serve model of building church;
- examples of what he and others are doing in these areas of Gospel engagement.

It was a worthwhile day, and for the first go, I consider it to be a success. It is hoped that it might become an annual event, and I believe ACC NSW would be happy to co-sponsor and support it.

After the meeting I was talking with Nigel Rogers & Steve Everist about the relationship between EL250 & ACC. It was encouraging to hear that they would like:

- a) the resources, experience & expertise of the EL250 churches to be used to encourage other congregations in the UCA: and,
- b) their desire that the EL250, ACC & similar like-minded networks in the UCA get together some time for a celebration of our common confession. I suggested to piggy-backing it on the end of the annual EL250 conference held on the Gold Coast.

It is my hope & prayer that the Evergreen concept will be an annual opportunity for ACC congregations, and indeed any congregation in NSW that is concerned to grow a Gospe-focused church and refresh their leaders, to gather for a day of encouragement and inspiration.
Ian Weeks, Chair ACC NSW Movement, and National Council member



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PUBLIC SQUARE

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

The Christmas wrap

The Christmas story is now routinely ignored at Christmas. Kindergartens and schools rarely risk the ire of multicultural secularists. Santa and his elves or indigenous dreamtime stories are a safer bet. We wish each other 'happy holidays' or 'season's greetings'. Fearing loss of market share, fewer cards portray the nativity. One could be excused for thinking that Santa and his elves delivered the crib for the baby Jesus! As Scott Monk says, we need to remember "Mary didn't work behind the perfume counter. Joseph didn't stand around with a microphone spruiking mobile phone deals. And hark, the herald angels didn't sing: 'Twenty-five percent off everything in store until midnight.'" (*The Weekend Australian*, 22-2/12/13 p16)

In short, the Festival of the Incarnation has been reshaped to fit the modern worldview that promotes consumerism or prizes the values of universal worth. As Ross Douhat says, "This world picture is Christianish but syncretistic; adaptable, easy-going and egalitarian". (*The Age* 24/12/13, p15).

This picture now suits many Christians embarrassed that the exclusive claim made in the Gospels is a barrier to interfaith dialogue and an offence to modern sensibilities. Thankfully, not everybody succumbs to the new regime. Monk, grateful that the Church by the Bridge offered free Christmas lunch to unwanted folk in Kirribilli (Sydney), reminds us that "God humbled himself by becoming human, washed people's feet

The influence of the Christian faith in the West is, at its best, a critique of self-centred 'celebrity culture' and an antidote to ideologies of the left, right and centre.

and cared for lepers, prostitutes and women millennia before suffrage and equality were even heard of; so why shouldn't the rest of us?"

The gradual silencing of the Christmas story will have grave consequences. As Douhat notes, the secularist picture being drawn over the Christian world-view "proposes a purely physical and purposeless universe, inhabited by evolutionary accidents where the sense of self is probably illusory. And yet it continues to insist on moral and political absolutes with all the vigour of a 17th century New England preacher." Embarrassed Christians beware! The loss of the Christmas story won't guarantee a more humane, charitable and tolerant society.

Polycelibacy

In *The Age* (22/12/13, p5) Richard Castles writes humorously about names now used to describe relations between the sexes. Unhappy to be identified as single, and not prepared to let friendship with his many female

friends be misconstrued as intimately and sexually polyamorous, he calls himself a celipoly. Nowadays, when close friendships are often assumed to involve sexual intercourse, and individuals without sexual partners often feel isolated, it is refreshing to find this imaginative new take on our deepest and most enjoyable relationships.

Seeking asylum is not a crime

The way we speak about people fleeing tyranny matters. The fact that some boat people may be 'illegal maritime arrivals' doesn't justify the Federal Government's blanket use of the term. It evokes fear and anger among the Australian public and overlooks the fact that the vast majority of 'asylum seekers' are eventually found to be genuine refugees.

The scale of the humanitarian crises facing millions of displaced persons, outside or within their own countries, is beyond the resources of countries like Australia. It is necessary for sovereign nations to protect their borders, and work towards regional co-operation. But there is no excuse for adopting language and policies that dehumanise some of the most vulnerable people with whom we share the earth.

It is encouraging that National Church leaders have written to the Prime Minister urging him to uphold the UN Refugee Convention to which Australia is a signatory. It is also pleasing to see, on Australia Day, that

nearly 18,000 people from 155 countries were warmly welcomed as they pledged their loyalty to Australia.

It would be a shame if our large intake of migrants and refugees, their enthusiasm to become citizens, and the work being done by thousands of volunteers at asylum seeker centres around the country, were to be discounted in the eyes of the global community by the mistreatment of vulnerable people who reach our shores by boat.

Satanic erection

The Satanic Temple religious group has applied for permission to erect a 2.1 metre statue of Satan in the Capitol grounds of Oklahoma City (*The Age*, 14/1/14 p11). “Depicted as a Baphomet, a goat headed figure with wings and horns, sitting on a throne with smiling children at its side”, it claims that “the monument would be a ‘homage’ to Satan and a symbol of religious freedom”. The claim rests, in part, on the presumed equivalence of the proposed statue and the place of the Ten Commandments in U.S. law. It sometimes takes an odd case to clarify the grave issues now facing the advocates of a culture of life!

Cultural amnesia

Christopher Bantick’s criticism of an education system that enshrines Gen Y’s “cultural decline” (*The Age* 7/1/14 p15) got a predictably strong response. He argued that a pervasive celebrity culture, represented by Lou Reed, Kurt Cobain etc., is changing young people’s thinking for the worse. “Moronic introspection is celebrated as significant and worthwhile.” His solution to what he calls “our jingoistic egalitarianism (which) has gone too far with the sense of cultural equity” is to place greater emphasis on ‘high culture.’

John Polesel, Prof of Education at Melbourne University, was among many to reply (*The Age* 8/1/14 p19). He accused Bantick of “glib criticism” of young people and of using the ‘historically constructed’ distinction between ‘celebrity culture’ and ‘high culture’—noting that Shakespeare was once popular entertainment.

Their disagreement is part of a much wider public discussion about the place of Western civilisation in education. Debates have centred on whether, by focusing on environmental issues and indigenous and Asian cultural perspectives, knowledge of

IAN CLARKSON

Does God test us?

Well, what do you mean by test?

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.

What was happening on Mount Moriah where Abraham headed off at Yahweh’s clear word to sacrifice? No lamb in sight, only his tender son trundling at his side.

He was to be tested. But what is a test?

We must sit for tests to progress to beyond our present status. And how we relish those better than hoped for, beyond expectation results. Our minds flickering images of where we will be next. Always looking ahead. This was the nature of Abraham’s test. No morose sufferer, dumbly pushed along by out-of-control circumstances.

Something wonderful was about to happen. Abe knew it! He was jumping out of his skin with hope, He knew his Lord of grace and all was well, even though he trembled.

Yahweh was taking him to a vision of the future so devastatingly glorious that time and eternity merged. It was sheer ecstasy here for Abraham. “God will provide” was the strong truth all around him like bees humming in warm air.

What was the bursting hope of this moment in Abe’s soul? Well according to the final chapter; this chosen nomadic herdsman “saw the day of Jesus”—he grasped the plan of the resurrection, what Augustine wrote about some two millennia later which was to shape the closing chapters of history—the eternal City of God! Abraham saw it: yes he did, he saw it!

No stunned rabbit in the spotlight here. More like a lion about to seize its prey, was Abraham. Or a child immersed in their project,

Of course we shrink from it, that’s the very definition of test, or trained, as the word also means.

hands bumping together getting it together! His test wasn’t dumb mindless passive panic. His was a test verging on graduation to the top level.

Test time is opportunity time. Singer Darlene Szchech recently cancer diagnosed affirmed “Even though the past days have been very tough at times, the Holy Spirit has brought me endless comfort and the Word of God is literally holding me moment by moment,” She expects more of that. What treasures.

Of course we shrink from it, that’s the very definition of test, or trained, as the word also means.

Circumstances falling upon us might push us to despair and loud cries and deep adjustments that jar the soul make our moments and our day.

But. Despair will soon loose their surly bonds and though perplexity may be our lot for longer our eyes will widen and childlike faith will see us soon seeing unimaginable horizons of lasting joy and solid pleasures! That is the guts of test. We don’t set our own test. They are gently graded by the Lord of life for pilgrims for whom boredom is never on the curricula. To yank us or to woo us to the wonderful. Always.

classical literature and arts, including Greek and Christian, has been neglected. It would be a pity if, when ancient wisdom from other socio-religious cultures is being taught, the Judeo-Christian heritage were to be sacrificed.

The influence of the Christian faith in the West is, at its best, a critique of

self-centred ‘celebrity culture’ and an antidote to ideologies of the left, right and centre. The loss of that cultural tradition in our schools, and ignorance about its origin in the loving purposes of God for all, will eventually threaten social harmony that upholds human dignity.

Reading Genesis for truth

The letter "Creation and evolution" (Sept. edition) seems somewhat confusing given the debate about debate is not really an issue, especially when we consider the comment "an argument they were bound to lose as knowledge increased".

Truth always actually wins an argument in spite of what people may think. Just because a majority may yell the loudest, makes no difference to what is true.

As has been said before, even if no-one believes, for instance, that God exists, makes no difference to the fact he does exist, and conversely, even if everyone believes that something which is not true, is true, makes no difference to the fact that it is false.

The evolution versus creation debate is not about whether anything evolves or not, but rather about whether the ridiculous theory that says life came about by a cosmic big bang, or some other fanciful idea which at its core seeks to do away with the existence of God, is true or not. Note the comment about the "recent work in genetics".

What is not needed is "that we must read the early chapters of Genesis in a different way". Far too many in the church have been doing that for a long time anyway.

That is basically why the necessity for the confessing movement in the church.

What must be borne in mind in regard to evolution as being the source of life is that this belief completely cuts across the essence of the gospel.

Ploughman

Greetings all ...I always read the contents of the ACCatalyst and many a time some of the articles are a real plough just to be sure there isn't some gem hidden within.

The Sept 2013 Marriage article by Rod James was well worth the read from the opening to closing words. Pass on my thanks to Rod for presenting it so thoughtfully.

Also to Robyn for her meaningful cat ponderings and to Ian Clarkson for his short point specific subject articles and to Peter for the film reviews.

Every article every time can't be a winner to all but the magazine caters for all somewhere within its contents with eyes to read & a mind to ponder.

*Brenton Sutton,
Bute Uniting Church SA*

As Ken Ham points out in several books, the Bible clearly teaches, death only came about because of man's sin.

The general theory of evolution indicates life and death over millions of years, so this is easily seen to be false in the light of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If there was no death as a result of sin, Jesus did not need to die on the cross.

*Trevor C Carter
Bordertown, SA*

Refreshing

I found Ian Clarkson's article (Dec 2013) refreshingly honest and helpful. How often we confuse caring forthrightness with judgement, and honest opinion with accusation. Far too limiting if we are to be guided by God's word and the ministry of our Lord (John 4:17) and (1 Tim 4:14, James 5:13--16).

Many who call at this manse are seeking someone to listen, and guide by way of God's word

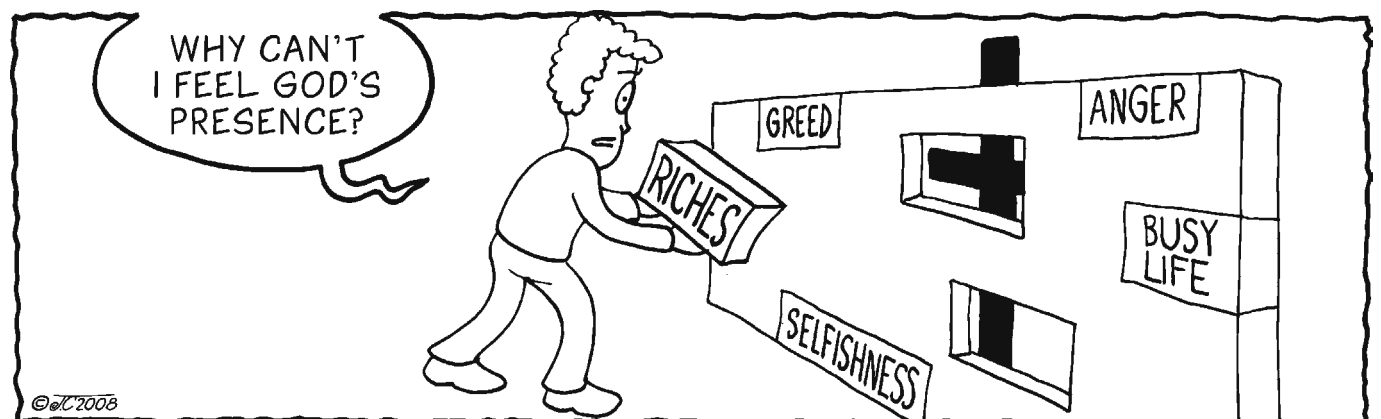
It would mean that we sit on our hands while some of our brothers and sisters self-destruct, and governments, and (at times) church leaders go awry with impunity.

Ian's paper encourages and frees elders and pastors to actually engage in ministry with those in need of support, guidance, and maybe correction.

Many who call at this manse are seeking someone to listen, and guide by way of God's word—the last thing needed is judgement, but a close second is abrogation.

Engagement means, of necessity, sharing the issues.

Thank you ACCatalyst team for a great publication. Blessings
(Pastor) Grant Jewell, Bordertown SA



John Wesley and the authority of Scripture

A paper by Glen O'Brien
presented to the ACC
National conference

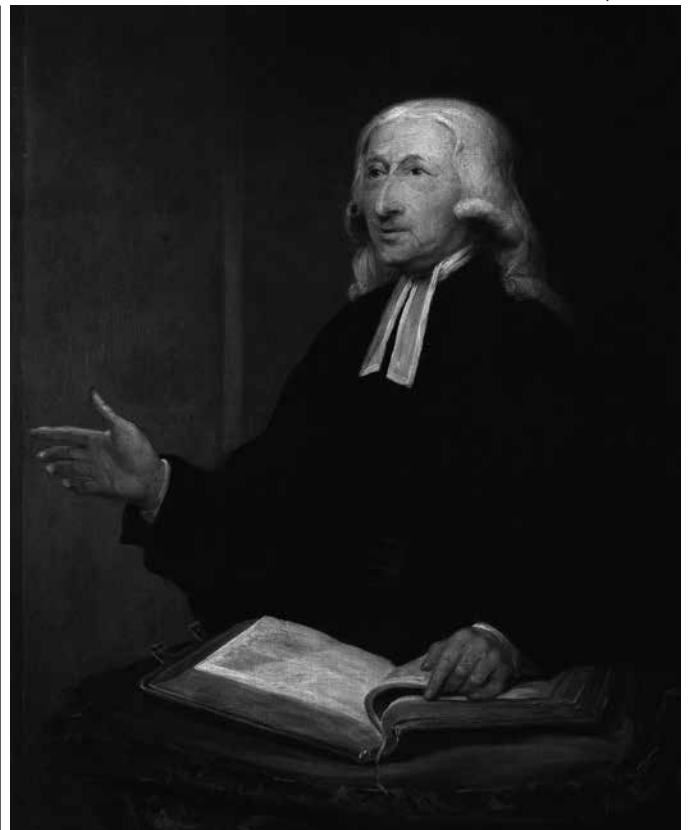
It is sometimes difficult to say too much about one of the precedent traditions of the Uniting Church in Australia, since to do so might seem to be privileging the contribution of one tradition over the other two. There are those who feel that hearkening back to John Wesley's views on Scripture would be a backward step when the Uniting Church is called to be a new, dynamic, and forward-looking church. Yet the *Basis of Union* calls us to pay close attention to such formative voices of the past.

Its paragraph 10 calls upon the Church to "listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793)" ...and commits its ministers and instructors to "study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture."¹

The study of Wesley's writings and other important historical documents must of course be carried out with the recognition that they are bound to a great extent by their historical context. John Wesley was a man of his time and we cannot simply restate his formulations as though no further thinking were needed. Nonetheless, Wesleyan thought is part of the Uniting Church's DNA even if it seems sometimes to operate as a recessive gene. Close attention to Wesley's theology can continue to be one way that the Uniting Church can live out of that freedom which is made ever new by the Spirit.²

At times more liberal Christians have appealed to Wesley to support a casual attitude toward doctrine or formal theology or in order to stress the primacy of religious experience or the importance of reason in arriving at theological conclusions. More conservative Christians have often also used Wesley to support their own conclusions or to garner support for a particular theory of

National Portrait Gallery, London



Portrait of John Wesley by William Hamilton (1751-1801)

**Wesley does not belong
exclusively to liberals or
conservatives, though both have
misused him**

biblical inspiration, such as inerrancy. Some of Wesley's pronouncements do make him sound like a biblical literalist. For example he said that "if there be *any* mistakes in the Bible there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth,"³ and "Yea I am a Bible bigot. I follow it in all things, both great and small"⁴. However these rhetorical

flourishes need to be placed in the context of his broader approach to Scripture. Wesley does not belong exclusively to liberals or conservatives, though both have misused him to defend their own idiosyncratic views of biblical authority. It is illegitimate to hijack Wesley by using selectively-chosen excerpts from his writings for political purposes of our own.

John Wesley famously described himself as ‘a man of one book’ – a term he borrowed from Jeremy Taylor. Of course this did not mean that he read no book but the Bible. He was in fact a remarkably well-read person across virtually every area of human enquiry. But it does mean that no book was more important to him than the Bible.

Scripture has always been and remains foundational to the Church’s grammar. At the same time it is recognised that since the earliest days of the Church, theological study has involved consulting a range of sources beyond the text of the Bible. In the earliest centuries of the Church the sources of theology were established as two-fold—scripture and tradition—a ‘Rule of Faith’ controlled by the written text and the apostolic faith delivered to each succeeding generation. The Anglican Triad in place in Wesley’s day added a third source and came up with scripture, tradition, and reason. The so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral, a term first coined by the Methodist ecumenist Albert Outler in the mid-twentieth century, went on to affirm a fourfold model of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

Paragraph 11 of the Uniting Church’s *Basis of Union* reflects openness to scholarly enquiry of the Bible.

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that God has never left the Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God’s living Word. In particular the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and gives thanks for the knowledge of God’s ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith...It prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds.*⁵

This statement has sometimes been used by more liberal Christians to minimise the authority of the Bible and maximise the opinions of scholars but clearly this is to miss the intention of the framers of the Basis of Union. In American Methodism, where the Wesleyan Quadrilateral has garnered the most support, liberal Methodists have understood tradition pluralistically and the scope of experience has often been broadened beyond Christian experience to include all of human experience. More conservative believers are concerned that the “Quadrilateral” has become the “Equilateral” with scripture and tradition often having less authority in practice than reason and experience. Outler himself came to regret having coined the term. Where he had intended the Quadrilateral as a kind of metaphor, it had instead become a strict method and furthermore a cause of division in the Church, which for an ecumenist such as Outler must have been particularly distressing.

Wesley was an eclectic thinker who borrowed from a variety of traditions and resources and read voraciously across the breadth of Christian traditions so that his the-



While affirming that the entire Bible is inspired and authoritative he did not seem interested in demonstrating the historical and scientific veracity of all its statements.

ology was somewhat diverse while remaining rooted in the Gospel. While he affirmed the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) he interpreted *sola* to mean ‘primarily’ rather than “solely” or “exclusively”.⁶ To be a person of one book meant “regarding none, comparatively, but the Bible”.⁷ The word “comparatively” is significant here as is borne out by advice he gave to one of his preachers who claimed “but I read only the Bible”.⁷ Wesley replied, “But this is rank enthusiasm [fanaticism]. If you need no book but the Bible you are got above St. Paul. He wanted others too. ‘Bring the books,’ says he, ‘but especially the parchments,’ (those written on parchment). ‘But I have no taste for reading.’ Contract a taste for it by use or return to your trade”.⁸

In his Preface to the *Standard Sermons*, Wesley describes his approach to the reading of Scripture. As a model of his experiential approach it is worth quoting in full:

To candid, reasonable men, I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart. I have thought I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: Just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, — the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: Only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights: — “Lord, is it not thy word, ‘If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God?’ Thou ‘givest liberally, and upbraidest not.’ Thou hast said, ‘If any be willing to do thy will, he shall know’. I am willing to do, let me know, thy will.” I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual”. I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which

*my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach.*⁹

This preface displays a number of interesting aspects of Wesley's approach to the Bible. The source of the biblical revelation is God. The purpose of that revelation is to point the way to heaven, and the Bible is sufficient for such knowledge. When facing difficulty in understanding the Scriptures, three steps are followed: 1) Prayerfully ask God for understanding; 2) Compare scripture with scripture; 3) Consult mature Christian opinion.

It is not quite right to refer to Wesley as 'pre-critical' because of course the higher criticism of the nineteenth century could not have affected his thinking. It is perhaps unnecessary and certainly difficult to guess at what his response may have been to the later trajectory in biblical studies but his appropriation of the critical study of his own day suggests that he would probably not have taken an overly conservative approach.

Though he valued the Authorised Version of the Bible, Wesley always preferred the study of the Scriptures in their original languages over any and all translations. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, he drew heavily on Johann Albrecht Bengel's new (1734) critical text of the NT for his own translation, as well as Bengel's 1742 commentary, and he departed from the AV in over 12,000 instances. While many of these changes were minor, others reflected serious text-critical issues.¹⁰

Wesley was no biblical literalist or fundamentalist. While reading the Scriptures devoutly and prayerfully as a road map to heaven, and depending upon divine counsel and the principle of analogy (comparing scripture with scripture), he at the same time appropriated the best critical scholarship of his day in order to aid a fuller understanding of its contents.

While affirming that the entire Bible is inspired and authoritative, he did not seem interested in demonstrating the historical and scientific veracity of all its statements. It was the saving significance of the Scriptures and their capacity to shape the lives of readers in Christ-like ways that mattered most to him.

*Every truth which is revealed in the oracles of God is undoubtedly of great importance. Yet it may be allowed that some of those which are revealed therein are of greater importance than others as being more immediately conducive to the grand end of all, the eternal salvation of [humanity].*¹¹

Passages he especially privileged include 1 Corinthians 13, the Sermon on the Mount, and the First Epistle of John, each of which has a focus on love as the fulfilment of the law and the most authentic mark of Christianity.¹² Randy Maddox observes how this approach reflects "his commitment to reading all of Scripture *comparatively*, in light of [the] motif of God's universal prevenient transforming love."¹³

According to the Nazarene theologian Rob L. Staples, "In reality the final religious authority for Wesley was the gospel. But it was the gospel as revealed to us in Scripture, mediated to us through the historic Christian tradition, explicated and made understandable through reason, and authenticated in experience."¹⁴



Passages he especially privileged have a focus on love as the fulfilment of the law

As well as subordinating everything to the gospel itself, Wesley was well aware of the limitations of the human mind. In his sermon *Catholic Spirit*, Wesley made it clear that human opinion is always subject to the weakness of human capacity.

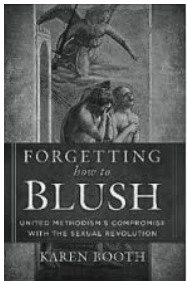
*Although every man necessarily believes that every particular opinion which he holds is true (for to believe any opinion is not true, is the same thing as not to hold it); yet can no man be assured that all his own opinions, taken together, are true. Nay, every thinking man is assured they are not, seeing... "To be ignorant of many things, and to mistake in some, is the necessary condition of humanity."*¹⁵

If this insight is applied to the reading of Scripture, then the inevitability of differing interpretation of the same passage becomes clear. Because of such differing opinions, the identification of some kind of "analogy of faith" becomes important if interpretative decisions are to remain within the bounds of orthodoxy, however generous that orthodoxy may be. Wesley defined the "analogy of faith" as "the general tenor of the [oracles of God]... that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein, touching original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation".¹⁶ "Every article, therefore, concerning which there is any question, should be determined by this rule, every doubtful Scripture interpreted, according to the grand truths which run through the whole."¹⁷

Today we would want to expand the scope of salvation beyond the personal and "inward" to include larger social, political, and environmental concerns. Indeed in Wesley's later sermons there is just such a broadening to include a vision of the "new creation" that embraced the entire universe, including non-human species, and the inanimate world as the objects of God's perfecting grace. We may do well to borrow from Wesley this interpretive key—seeking always to understand difficult passages in light of the Gospel of God's redeeming love.

Thankfully the old battle lines drawn between liberals and conservatives over the authority of Scripture are rapidly becoming the stuff of historical enquiry rather than being situated at the coalface of conflict in the church. Post-liberals have discovered the value of actually preaching sermons based on the Bible and of calling people to follow Jesus, and post-conservatives have discovered that biblical criticism does not destroy but only enhances the foundations of their faith. The Church should not be sidelined into futile disputes over outdated theories of biblical inspiration, often more driven by philosophical concerns than they are informed by the Christian tradition itself. We may find instead that the area of dispute will lie in determining whether or not the

Methodism's forgotten blushes



Forgetting How to Blush: United Methodism's Compromise with the Sexual Revolution (Bristol House, Fort Valley GA, 2012)

Karen Booth's book is a fascinating account of a major US denomination's journey in tandem with the sexual revolution within the wider society. The title is excellent and one that we could well use in parts of our society as

well. It comes from Jeremiah 6: 15 "Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD."

Karen is the director of Transforming Congregations, an organisation that aims to "help train and empower local church leaders so they can reach out with faithfulness and compassion to the sexually confused, broken and sinful in their midst", based on 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7: "Equipping the Church to model and minister sanctified sexuality".

Transforming Congregations is now an official Program of Good News, the largest and oldest renewal and reform ministry within the United Methodist Church.

This is a very helpful book, as church events are related to the influence of societal and educational changes—especially through certain key leaders. One in particular was clearly very influential—Rev. Dr Ted McIlvenna, who has become a celebrated gay rights figure (though not homosexual himself). I even found an article on

him entitled *The Porn-Again Minister* highlighting his extensive collection of pornography and involvement in liberal sexual education movements.

This book provides helpful background to a denomination not dissimilar to the Uniting Church, though more complex due to its size and number of ministers, specialised ministries and range of congregations. There are simply many more people able to be involved in experimentation and to press for change. It was illuminating to read a more detailed analysis of the protests conducted at the four yearly General Methodist Conferences. Though the General Conference of the UMC has continually affirmed a normative Christian sexual ethic, the libertarian activism among some UMC ministers and members has not ceased. Indeed as the website *Juicy Ecumenism* has pointed out, even over the last 12 months there have been a variety of practices and activities within the liberal-leaning lobby organisations, which need to be highlighted so people can be aware of the extent of the issues involved.

There is an important section on the *third way* that was very helpful. This is the idea that a third way will be found that will allow everyone to live in harmony and peace (my paraphrasing). I will comment more about this on the web version of my review, but for those who have seen this debate in the wider church, you would understand that the third way often means simply that those who hold traditional and biblical understandings of sexual practice are helped to compromise even further!

Peter Bentley, National Director of the ACC

WESLEY

Church's discourse sets forth the gospel clearly. It is likely that the future of the Uniting Church in Australia will not be in the hands of either liberals or fundamentalists (both of whom will continue to move toward the fringes of the Church). The future may instead lie in the 'radical middle' where biblical authority is recognised within the framework of a generous Trinitarian orthodoxy that allows difference of opinion within a deeply tradition of commitment to "God's universal prevenient transforming love". Such an approach is deeply Wesleyan but also at the same time the possession of the whole Church.

Glen O'Brien is a Minister of the Word in the Uniting Church whose placement is to theological education in the Salvation Army. He is Head of Humanities and Associate Professor of Church History and Theology at Booth College, a Member Institute of the Sydney College of Divinity.

1 *The Basis of Union* 1992 Edition (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2003), paragraph 10, pp. 9-10.

2 *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 6, p. 8.

3 John Wesley, Journal entry for 24 July 1776, in W. R. Ward and R. Heitzenrater, eds. *Works vol. 23, Journals and Diaries VI (1776-1786)* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 25.

4 John Wesley, Journal entry for 5 June. 1776, in Ward and Heitzenrater, *Works vol. 21 Journals and Diaries IV (1755-1765)* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 42

5 *Basis of Union*, paragraph 11 (1977 updated 1992).

6 Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: OUP, 1964), 18.

7 John Wesley, 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,' in Thomas Jackson, ed. *The Works of Rev. John Wesley, Vol. XI* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1829-1831. Reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 373.

8 John Wesley, 'Minutes of Several Conversations,' in *Works vol. VIII [Jackson edition]*, 315.

9 John Wesley, 'Preface,' in Outler, *Works vol. 1*, 104-106.

10 Randy Maddox, 'John Wesley - A Man of One Book,' in Joel B. Green and David F. Watson, eds. *Wesley, Wesleyans, and Reading Bible as Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 4-6.

11 John Wesley, Sermon 73, 'Of Hell,' in Outler, ed. *Works vol. 2 Sermons III*: 711-114 (1986), 31.

12 Randy Maddox claims that Wesley referred to First John in his Sermons and other writings more frequently than any other biblical book. R. Maddox, 'John Wesley - A Man of One Book,' 11.

13 R. Maddox, 'John Wesley - A Man of One Book,' 12.

14 Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 174.

15 John Wesley, Sermon 39, 'Catholic Spirit,' in Outler, ed. *Works vol. 2 Sermons II*: 34-70 (1985), 83-84.

16 John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: William Bowyer, 1755. Reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 49, commenting on Romans 12:6. For Wesley's understanding of the term *analogia fidei* see Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 57 and Maddox, *Men of the Book*, 136f.

17 J. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 397.



Assembly of Confessing Congregations

within the Uniting Church in Australia

Resources

All ACC printed resources are available on the ACC website. Material on our website is free and can be easily downloaded. This includes the study guides for the DVDs: www.confessingcongregations.com/resources

There is a selection of other DVD resources and material on VIMEO, especially presentations from conferences and material introducing the ACC (links on website or search).

If you are interested in printed copies of any ACC material please contact the ACC office. ACC brochures are free. Note: There is a charge for the DVDs and Bible Studies if supplied by ACC.

ACC Office

Email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com
Post: PO Box 968, Newtown NSW 2042
Tel: (02) 9550 5358

Websites

1. Confessing Congregations – www.confessingcongregations.com

Major sections include: History, Foundational Documents, Commissions, Sermons, Devotional and pastoral sections. The ACCatalyst magazine is available to download (back issues) and there is an index to search for articles. The Culture Connections section has areas on Books, Contemporary Issues and Film and Media.

2. Uniting Views – www.unitingviews.com

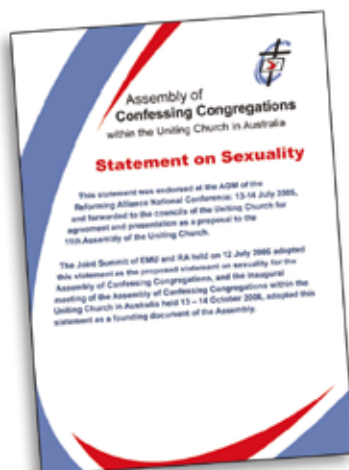
The resources section provides resources and comments from ACC members (and also some non-members who have sympathy with the ACC on certain issues). A significant section is devoted to material on Marriage.

Founding Documents (Brochures)

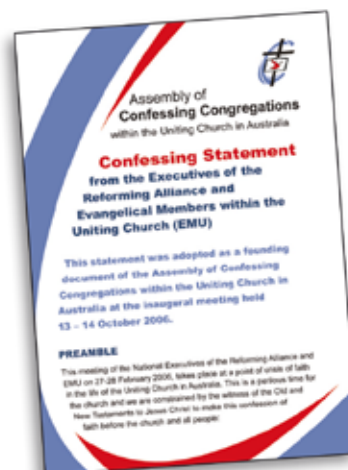
The Charter (2006)



Statement on Sexuality (2006)



Confessing Statement (2006)

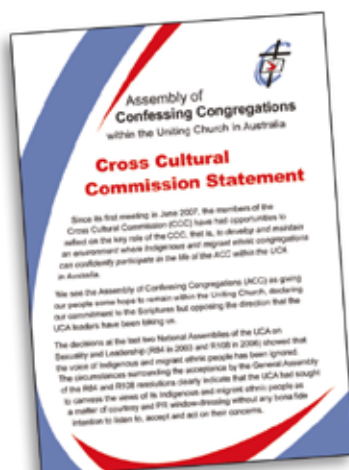


ACC Brochures

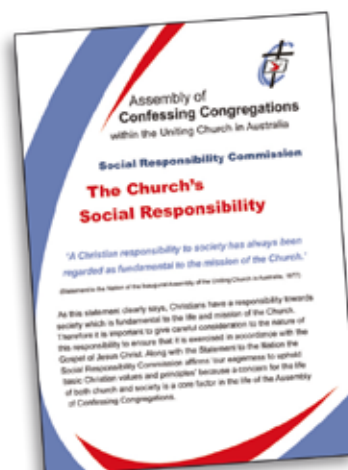
ACC Vision and Goals 2007-2017 (2008)



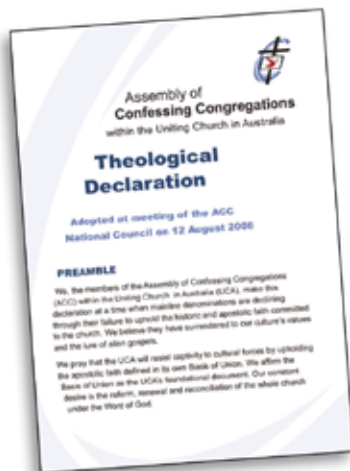
Cross Cultural Commission Statement (2008)



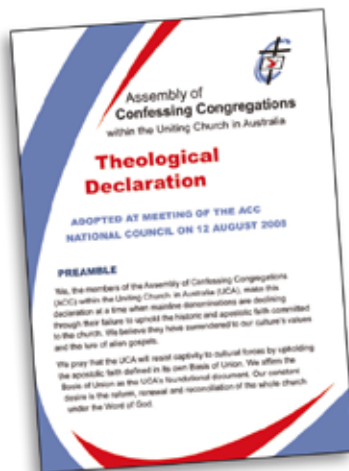
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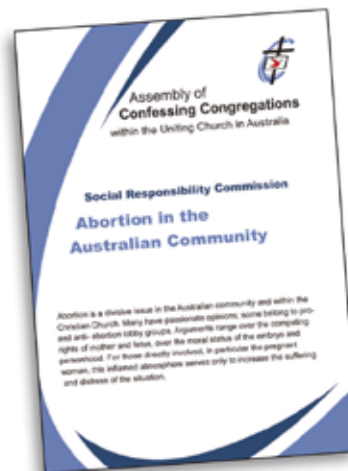
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ACC Theological Declaration: Commentary and Study Guide (2009)

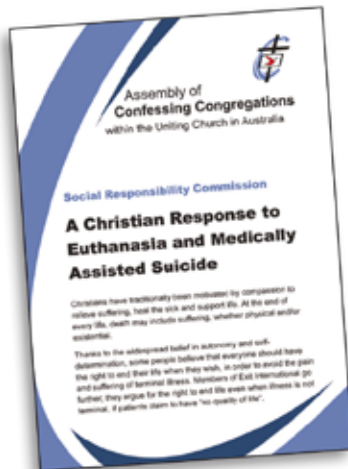


Abortion in the Australian Community (2010)

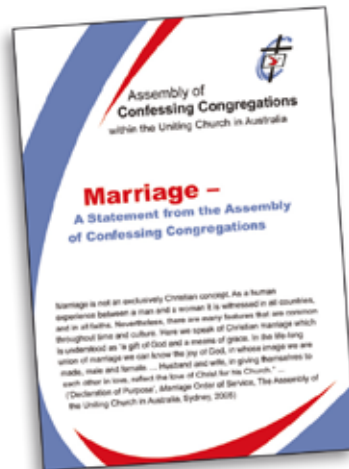


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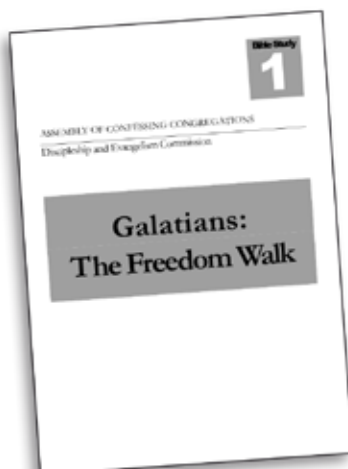


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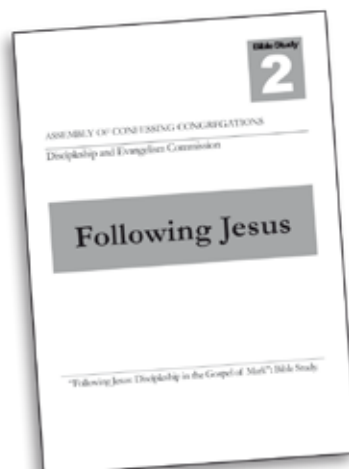


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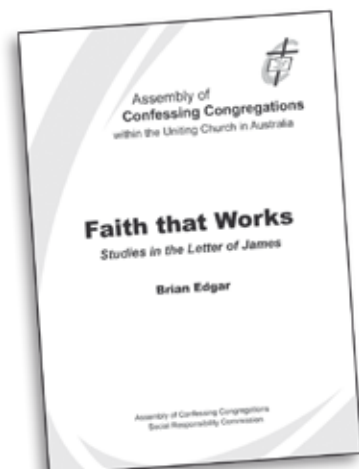
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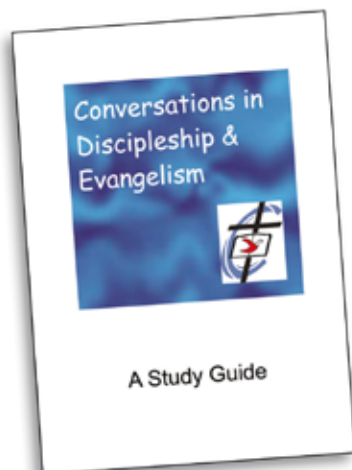


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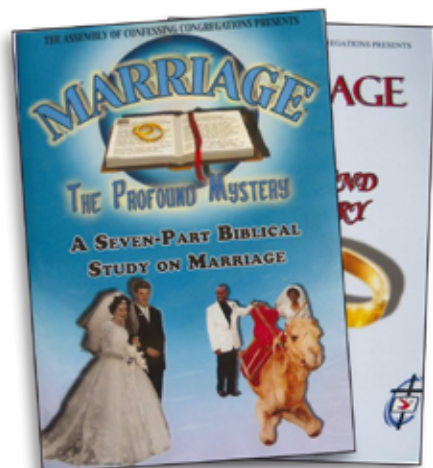
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ISBN 978-0-9923155-0-4.
(Free resource for congregational use).



Magazine – ACCatalyst

The ACCatalyst magazine is provided as part of membership.
First edition published: June 2007 – to present.
The magazine is now archived on the website, and can be accessed at:
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ACC046

ACC Pin
This attractive pin has the ACC logo.



ACC Business Card
A handy Business card with information and contact details about the Assembly of Confessing Congregations.

Max Champion's ten years

Report of the ACC National Director (2004-2013)

Formation

The gestation of ACC—the Assembly of Confessing Congregations—was long and torturous. In September 2003 73 members of EMU (Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church in Australia) met in Sydney in response to the Tenth Assembly resolution on sexuality and leadership (Resolution 84 as it was known). From that discussion, the Reforming Alliance (RA) was established. Early in 2004 I was asked and agreed to chair this movement, with Mary Hawkes as deputy.

The decision created problems. Many of my congregation were opposed or uneasy about it. As well, there were substantial differences of theology and liturgical practice within the RA, and long-time friends and colleagues disapproved in varying degrees.

Leadership

The Rev. Phil and Lyn Marshall were splendid leaders of RA from their base at Newtown Mission, as were Mary Hawkes and the Rev. Steve Estherby. After Mary and the Rev. Nick Hawkes left the Uniting Church in 2005, after their presbytery failed to approve an extension of ministry placement for Nick. Steve Estherby became chair of EMU and vice-chair of RA. He played a pivotal role on the floor of the Eleventh Assembly in 2006 and in the resulting formation of the ACC. These leaders and many others suffered greatly for their defence of orthodox biblical doctrine. We owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Petitions and Resolutions

It soon became clear from RA and EMU petitions that the overwhelming majority of Uniting Church members opposed Resolution 84, confirming the findings of the Bentley Report on the 8000 plus responses to the 1996 Sexuality Task Group Report. Detailed research by Dr. Howard Bradbury (2004-2007) found that about 6,500 members and 45 ministers left the UCA as a result of Assembly's decision.

RA's most important achievements were the development of proposals on sexuality and leadership that later became the founding document of the ACC. RA members were encouraged to present these proposals to their presbyteries. Perhaps surprisingly, seven presbyteries



It soon became clear from RA and EMU petitions that the overwhelming majority of Uniting Church members opposed R84

and the Synod of Queensland endorsed them, and they were submitted as proposals to the Eleventh Assembly (2006).

Legal Doubts about Resolution 84

As a result of the concerns of many across the UC regarding R84, and after much prayerful consideration, RA determined before the 11th Assembly to seek and obtain legal advice¹ as to the validity of R84 and the consequences of its passage and was advised that R84 was unconstitutional and invalid. The Assembly President (Rev. Dr. Dean Drayton), President-Elect (Rev. Gregor Henderson) and General Secretary (Rev. Terence Corkin) were then informed of the RA's advice and the Assembly was also invited by RA to apply jointly with it to have the matter of validity clarified by a court for the sake of the whole Church; this was not taken up. Nothing about the RA's advice was conveyed to the Members of the 11th Assembly during any of the discussions that led to the passage of Resolution 108.

Consternation in the UCA

Meanwhile the formation of the ACC after the Eleventh Assembly (2006) caused consternation among church leaders. The choice of 'Assembly' was rightly interpreted as an attack on the authority of the UCA's national governing body. The decision to organise along congregational lines and set up Boards and Commissions

ACC REFLECTS

was seen as a threat to UCA structures of authority. Our accusation that in relation to sexuality and leadership the UCA was heretical caused predictable outrage.²

Dilemma for Congress and Migrant-ethnic churches

ACC's bold approach also intimidated some evangelicals, fellow-travellers and migrant-ethnic groups which had strongly supported RA. The Assembly PR machine seized on their anxiety. Assembly tactics changed when it was realised that ACC would gain credibility from constant public attack by church leaders. A new approach was to starve us of oxygen and ignore or disregard our concerns. Some people even questioned our loyalty to the UCA.

The new strategy was to assure the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and migrant-ethnic communities that their ethnic and cultural diversity, including their views on sexuality, would be respected, with the implication being that they should not publicly criticise the Assembly decisions on sexuality and leadership. Some migrant-ethnic leaders confided to the ACC their concern that public opposition could prejudice their use of UC properties.

Accordingly, some migrant-ethnic leaders, who held a contrary opinion to the official resolutions of their National Conferences and the overwhelming majority of their members, were appointed to certain official roles. Vast amounts of time and energy have been invested by Assembly, Synod and Presbytery officers to support migrant-ethnic congregations on other issues, in particular problems caused by 'second generation' adaptation to Australian society.

Migrant-ethnic leaders face heavy responsibilities in helping their people adapt to an unfamiliar culture. Understandably, they do not relish the prospect of additional pressure. Their cultural belief is that no matter how much you might disagree with your leaders, their authority is to be respected. The danger for the migrant-ethnic community is that this strongly-held cultural belief will be used to advantage by some UC leaders.

Ecumenical Links

The ACC is more than a dissenting group within one denomination. It is part of a historical and global ecumenical movement whose confession of Christ has public consequences. Cross-denominational concern about the direction of the UCA on sexuality matters has been privately expressed to the ACC. We have been blessed by continuing support from many church leaders in Australia and abroad.

'Marriage Equality' and UnitingJustice

Due to the militant push for so-called 'marriage equality' in Australia the issue of life-long same-sex unions will be a continuing problem for UCA leaders and members. It was vital, therefore, that Peter Bentley and I should accept the invitation to appear before the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee (May 2011) to answer questions about the ACC submission to the Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010.

It was also necessary to challenge the submission of Uniting Justice (UJ) to the Senate Inquiry. UJ advocated the acceptance of 'marriage equality' in a secular society, while arguing, somewhat implausibly, that individual churches could legitimately reach different conclusions. As an official representative of the UCA, UJ presumed

to speak on behalf of a church that has neither changed her doctrine of marriage nor decided whether she should accept and/or endorse same-sex unions as 'marriages' in community or church.

Concerns within the Evangelical Community

ACC is not alone in its concern. Through contact with leaders of several large evangelical congregations, ACC has become aware of the wider dismay at Assembly decisions on sexuality and leadership. ACC shares the concern of many Uniting Church members that no action has been taken to discipline those who issue public statements or conduct ceremonies that clearly contradict the UCA's doctrine of marriage.

Despite this convergence, it is disturbing that some evangelicals are reluctant to resist heretical beliefs and underhand tactics. Some are too easily persuaded about their valuable contribution to the UCA. Others have left the UCA and the ACC to join mainly small, like-minded congregations which have little or no ecumenical commitment and are prone to serious fractures in fellowship. These defections have seriously weakened the ACC's ability to provide a strong, congregation-based voice for the evangelical, reformed and orthodox faith of the ecumenical church, as attested in the Basis of Union.

Evaluation

Despite setbacks and disappointments, ACC and RA have provided, and ACC continues to provide strong theological leadership and Christian witness within and beyond the UCA. It is a miracle that ACC and RA have survived such a testing period. We were wise, from the outset, to speak of ourselves as an 'evangelical, reformed and orthodox' movement. It encouraged us to embrace the classical faith and theology of the ecumenical church, as confessed in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, and discouraged us from prematurely rejecting beliefs and practices among us that were strange to some of us. Our relative success in holding together different streams of theology and practice is a sign of 'unity in Christ' that allows 'diversity' in matters that do not belong to the substance of the faith.

The ACC is not judged by whether she is successful politically or numerically. We simply do what we are summoned to be by the God of righteousness-and-grace in anticipation of the new heaven and new earth promised to Israel and embodied in Jesus Christ as the one sign of hope for all people.

At the same time, we may have hard decisions to make if the Fourteenth Assembly (2015) decides to approve of same-sex unions as valid expressions of the church's doctrine of marriage.

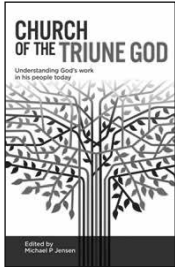
It has been a privilege to serve as the National Chair of RA and ACC for almost 10 years. I have been greatly blessed to be part of a team, splendidly supported by Peter Bentley, committed to upholding the faith of the Church. And my faith, theology and leadership have been deepened by having to exercise such public duties.

If you are not already a member and would now like to join the ACC, download a membership form from www.confessingcongregations/uploads/acc_member_brochure.pdf

1 While understandable that some may have thought that it was wrong to take legal action, we should remember that the law is the left hand of God to be used when the Church resiles from her mandate.

2 The caveat, that this did not mean hatred of those with whom we must strongly

Key writing on the trinity



Church of the Triune God. Edited by Michael Jensen Aquila Press Sydney First published 2013 pp.224. ISBN 978-1-922000-85-9. Price\$19.95

This book is written by a group of students Dr Robert Doyle who taught at the Anglican Moore Theological College in Sydney from 1982-2012.

Their essays are intended to celebrate his ministry. It is thus in the form of the traditional Festschrift (book in someone's honour) which focuses on two of the main themes of Dr Doyle's teaching. They are the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity from the Church Fathers Athanasius, Augustine to Karl Barth and T.F. & J.B. Torrance and the implication of the Trinity for the church's life and mission. Dr Doyle prepared his doctoral thesis under the supervision of Professor J.B. Torrance of Aberdeen, Scotland. Members of the ACC will recall a number of visits to Australia by Professor J.B. Torrance, through his close friendship and fellow teacher at Aberdeen, Professor George Yule. Many will have appreciated the lectures he gave on these visits.

There are 12 contributors and the papers cover the two themes of the Festschrift. One may be tempted to describe the contents as something like the curate's egg, 'something that is at least partly bad, but has some arguably redeeming features'. This would be somewhat churlish as there is some excellent material in some of these essays. In particular, though lacking reference to Athanasius' major works against Nestorius and the Arians, which furnish the basis of his Trinitarian and Christological teaching, the writer, though concentrating on his Festal Letters, expounds some key aspects of Athanasius' understanding of the Trinity and the relationship of the church and the Trinity. One important conclusion he draws from Athanasius' teaching relates to the contemporary church's preoccupation with 'ministry structures' in fulfilling its mission.

"So much of church life is niche-orientated rather than common – student ministries, men's ministries, women's ministries, children's, youth, seniors, marrieds, ... (Athanasius') observation of the infinitely sufficient grace that we have in common in the life of the church ... suggests (that) by our practices that the grace of salvation is insufficient to meet the diverse needs of our congregation."

This observation follows an analysis of Athanasius' understanding of God's 'accommodation' of himself to our needs manifest above all in the incarnation of God in Christ for our salvation.

The essay on T.F. Torrance shows an appreciation of the depths of Torrance's teaching on the Christian doctrine of God as holy Trinity whilst providing some important information about his spiritual formation and motivation as a Christian teacher. It should be noted that Torrance did not teach courses on the Trinity although the writer observes the oxymoron involved in the situation because Torrance was Professor of Christian



Robert Doyle, celebrated by his students

Dogmatics at Edinburgh University. It was not until he retired that his *magnum opus* on the Trinity (*The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*) was published. This strange state of affairs came about because of the laws of the Faculty of Divinity reserved teaching of the Trinity to the faculty of Divinity not Dogmatics! This was and is a prime example of the contradiction to which Karl Rahner draws attention, that in western theology the doctrine of the one God, as distinct from the Trinity, assumed primary importance. The Trinity in the West has become locked in splendid isolation. He observes that Western theologians speak, "of the necessary metaphysical properties of God, but not of God as experienced in salvation history in his free relations to his creatures. For should one make use of salvation history, it would soon become apparent that one speaks of him whom Scripture and Jesus calls Father, Jesus' Father, who sends the Son and who gives himself to us in the Spirit." (Rahner, K. *The Trinity*. London: Burns & Oates, 1970, p.18.)

It is precisely this malaise in Western theology, beginning with Augustine that this book, *The Church of the Triune God* seeks to address. Though it does not do so directly, the book does it by means of the practical orientation of the theological teaching of the one it seeks to honour. This endeavour, though concentrating on the experience of the Anglican Church of Australia and in particular the Sydney diocese, it is the critical task confronting the theological traditions of all Christian churches. It is obvious that the Sydney Anglicans at least know what the real problems are that confront the church in contemporary culture and attempt to offer an important clue as to where answers may be found. This is of no little importance and the authors are to be thanked for the offerings they have made.

Dr W. Gordon Watson, Port Macquarie. N.S.W.

Is the Bible a story

Responding to an *ACCatalyst* column by Ian Clarkson, Brian Hill examines Scripture as story, post-modernism and how we should respond.

Is not the Bible a story-book?
 “Mummy”, said my 5 year-old granddaughter, “are you telling a true story or a pretend one?”
 I always appreciate the way Ian Clarkson’s contributions to *ACCatalyst* illuminate the faith and stimulate further reflection. As did his September article, headed: “The Bible is not a story-book.” He argued that describing the Bible as a story-book misleads people into treating significant historical material as merely edifying tales. It’s a point worth making.

But “story” is nevertheless intrinsic to the biblical message. It is an overstatement to say flatly that the Bible is not a story book, just because department stores treat biblical stories as sentimental fantasies for marketing purposes, or because some theologians existentialise them as myths because they’ve listened to too many higher critics.

Would it be better to say that the Bible is a history book? This would also be misleading, because the Bible presents material in many other literary forms as well. And even the stories it tells are of different kinds: for example, (i) clearly fictional stories told for a moral purpose, like Jesus’s parables; (ii) stories which explicitly claim to describe significant historical events, like the Resurrection; and (iii) a grey area of salutary biblical stories about whose literal historicity even scholars with a high view of the inspiration of Scripture sometimes disagree.

Ian prefers to use the term “accounts”, but this runs up against the fact that historical accounts regress to being mere chronology unless causal explanations, which link the reported sequence of events together, are proffered. This is the moment when good historical reports are lit up by the power of story, as a personal narrator seeks to impart significance to an otherwise cold inventory of occurrences.

For liberal scholars who, seeking to appease sceptics in our scientific age, start from the assumption that miracles don’t happen, even the historicity of stories in the second category is denied, if those stories move outside the apparent uniformity of nature. If such scholars then still want to say that the Bible is the message which “controls” the church’s witness, as clause 5 of the *UCA Basis of Union* puts it, then some different account must be given for why stories supposedly based on imaginative invention are still to be regarded as normative for everyone’s faith and practice.

The “demythologisation” project that Bultmann launched in the 1940s urged us to feed on the mythic power of the stories in the New Testament, while sitting loose to any claims of historical fact. In a scientific age, Bultmann claimed, the sort of truth to look for in the Bible is existential, not literal-historical. In one way or another, that approach continues to appeal to many interpreters, aided and abetted by the postmodernist spirit of “Truth is what is true for you.” The irony is that this approach doesn’t demythologise the text, it mythologises any literal meaning the text may have had.

Oddly enough, there is another approach, apparently opposite to the mythologising approach, which also tends to de-nature biblical story. Its primary focus is on didactically abstracting dogmas from the text that facilitate the process of deciding who’s in and who’s out. Such approaches are not necessarily wrong in what they deduce from the text at an intellectual or doctrinal level, but they tend to shrink faith to head knowledge alone, overlooking God’s investment in the power of story to change hearts as well as heads, in literate as well as in pre-literate societies.

One approach to biblical interpretation is Narrative Criticism. It is sometimes called “post-liberal” because it offers a way to compensate for the vivisection of the biblical text through endless speculation about oral and documentary sources. It redirects our attention to the final form of the text, letting the connected narrative get under our skin in a way that dry documentary dissection or even historical verification alone cannot. The genius of narrative, or story, is that it mediates truth at a number of levels—intellectual, emotional, relational, and volitional.

The potential weakness of Narrative Criticism, however, is that it, too, is vulnerable to the mythologising project. It can neglect to address the question of whether the narrative, or parts of it, are truth or fiction. The focus is on the storytellers, and what their respective agendas were in arranging the source material in the way they did, implying that the kind of truth to be found in the narrative is what is true for the author. The postmodernist virus strikes again.

Echoing Ian’s observation on the same point, my *bête noire*, at one point in my theological studies, was the lecturer who regularly used phrases like “Mark’s Jesus said ...” or “According to John’s Jesus ...”, comparable to saying: “*The Age* reporter’s prime minister said ...” coyly leaving open the question of whether the prime minister did actually say it (sometimes there are good grounds for this “hermeneutic of suspicion” where the Australian press is concerned!).

In the case of the Bible, this focus rules out the possibility of redaction by the Holy Spirit, ensuring that

book?

the testimonies of the different writers together present a rounded and reliable record of what Jesus actually said and did. With a hermeneutic of suspicion, the best yield we can hope for is an optimistic ethical humanism, modelled on Jesus' example but ignoring his Lordship.

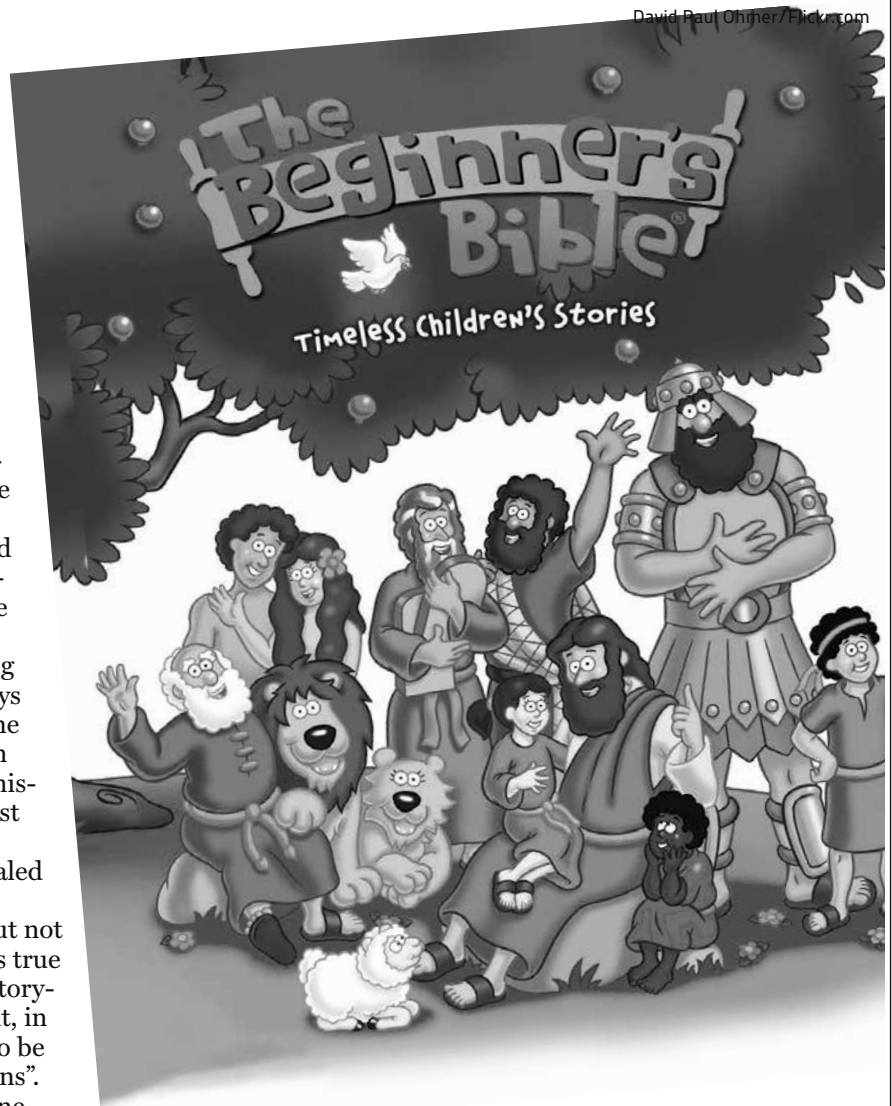
At one level, of course, the biblical record is one big narrative, progressively developing its story-line through many cumulative episodes. In a previous generation, Graham Scroggie described it as "the unfolding drama of redemption". Tom Wright employs a similar metaphor in his comparison of the Bible with a five-act Shakespearean play in which the script for the last act has been misplaced, and the actors (us, the church) must create their own story in a way consistent with the script of the earlier acts (the revealed Word) which they already have.

But these are just metaphors; helpful, but not to be taken as the whole truth. The same is true of Ian's contention that the Bible is not a story-book. The difficulty is that, as he points out, in general usage the word "story" does tend to be equated with what he called "made-up yarns". He rightly stresses that the crucial story-line running through the Bible appeals constantly to historical evidences, and may not be cavalierly dismissed as imaginative invention.

When people speak of the Bible as a story-book in a way that is meant to imply that its stories are merely human tales, the remedy is not to denigrate "story", but to point out that it doesn't automatically follow that all stories are made up. If evidence is advanced in the story to confirm it as historical, then they owe it to themselves to check it out – i.e. ask my grand-daughter's question.

Nor does substituting the term "historical accounts" for "true stories" suffice, for to do that is to factor out the authorial element that makes hearing or reading it an interpersonal experience. Histories, as I suggested earlier, can be very flat and intellectualist, lacking the element of personal engagement. The special power of story, as I also suggested earlier, exceeds that of other literary forms in its capacity to tap deep levels of meaning and identity in the reader. Whether a story is true or mythical is a question to be addressed subsequent to having been gripped by it.

In this sense, the grand narrative of the Bible, considered whole, does indeed have mythic power. But as C. S. Lewis famously said, in this particular case we encounter "the true myth"—the core story of the cosmos in relation



Australian best seller: *The Beginner's Bible*

to which other profound myths are but intuitive shadows; a story which has the power to transform our view of the world and our relationship with God, precisely because it is the true story of God's real and loving self-disclosure in our time-space.

And here, of course, I am at one with Ian in celebrating the realities of the physical birth, death and resurrection of Christ in our time-space. This story is at the heart of evangelism, to be told in a way that invites our friends to experience its mythic power, and then to consider its truth claims, and then (we pray) want to become part of it. This grand narrative, as we grasp its full scope, encourages us to merge our own story with God's, to relate personally to Christ, the central person in it, as Lord, and to identify with the company of believers as we await, and work for, the denouement foreshadowed in the grand narrative.

One further implication: When preaching from narrative material in the Bible, our first priority should be to make the story live, drawing people in with all the storyteller's artifice. Only after that should we then apply the expository mode, both positioning the story within the grand narrative and addressing the question of what kind of story it is – if historical, what evidences? – and what implications it has for our own daily faith, life and witness.

Apologetics, story, aesthetics and signposts

Rev Dr Robert Brennan

Apologetics is a discipline in extreme flux at present. It would be safe to say that there exists no single good model. Simply put, the older or more traditional modern 20th century approach to apologetics seeking to make a defence of the faith through rational argument and conclusion, is inadequate in the post-postmodern era. It actually always was inadequate. This approach fails to grasp that an effective case for faith often goes far beyond simple arguments.

Traditional /reason-based Apologetics

One recent example is *Five Views on Apologetics*—ed. by Stanley Grenz, These are Classical, Evidential, Cumulative case, Historical, Reformed—all aimed at intellectual persuasion. Each of the five supposed proponents of each “different” school has difficulty in distinguishing between their methodologies. They each have the same or very similar ways of developing intellectual theoretical arguments utterly disconnected in application and worse in not starting where people are at. They seem to construct this amazing doddle that is logically consistent and coherent but serves no real world purpose.

There seems to be this wonderful effort that implies you can only get to the truth of religion if you start here! Oh by the way in order to get “here” you need to have completed a liberal arts university course in western literature, philosophy and history. One example is William Lane Craig. It is surprising to see that his latest edition leaves out the chapter on Biblical infallibility and inserts material on Postmodernism. Speaking as a scientist, myself, his explanations of science are at best patchy.

Nonetheless, there is still a place for the teaching of simple logic as part of apologetics so that people might be able to identify basic logical fallacies in their own explanations of the faith as well as in the cases made by others.

In addition to this, no contemporary treatment of apologetics would be complete without reference to the

use of narrative theory, aesthetics and critical realism in apologetics.

Narrative

Story-based persuasion is appealing to post-moderns. A powerful story can move the heart and actions. Personal testimony, or telling our own story has always available and continues to play an important part in helping people to either consider Christianity or to bolster the believer’s confidence. The elements of story and our own story in particular that are appealing depend on building a relationship in which the other person can see genuineness, to develop Trust. All this is to open them to a new world of wonder, which by the way is one of the attractive points about alternative spiritualities. Have we lost this wonder in the Christian tradition? The better story challenges the hearer with the need to change and to consider making the faith in the story more personal. One memorable example recently was during wedding preparation with a young postmodern couple who told me the story of his sister and brother-in-law who went on a mission to South-east Asia in their holidays. “But, it wasn’t to teach Sunday school to village kids, they went into places to free slaves and young girls from prostitution. How does faith get that real?”

Narrative approaches seek to somehow replace an existing metanarrative or story describing the world, with a better more convincing faith narrative. Tim Keller uses this approach for singles in New York to try to get them to buy into a better/more realistic understanding of marriage than the impossibly romanticised western myth. It is interesting that the both atheist and Christian reviewers critical of his work, state that he doesn’t make the case for some of his comments. On the other hand Keller simply relates what he has found that has worked in convincing people to consider following Jesus themselves.

Narrative persuasion is not without its problems. The story form is not essentially neutral or even faith-friendly. A solely narrative approach has no basis in making truth or ethical claims and may even promote relativism. Wittgenstein is conscious of the need to spell out what are the underlying consideration and games being issued. Robert Alter in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* deliberately includes a provocative essay in which the



particular author reduces the meaning of a well-known biblical story to fish=penis=god. The point is not how wrong this is! It is rather that narrative alone lacks the ability to determine rightness or wrongness.

The philosopher Christopher Insole has telling criticism of one recent narrative movement, Radical Orthodoxy, noting that it merely attempts to replace one unsubstantiated narrative with another equally unsubstantiated narrative.

While narrative can be a powerful tool there can remain unresolved intellectual dissociations and tensions that may still require resolution.

Aesthetics

This is not simply about saying that truth is beauty, but is rather more like what Barth pointed out as the reason for his *Götterdämmerung* as a young theologian that changed his life and theology. The issue is this, "Does the way in which you describe the world, purpose and your place in the community end up calling what is evil or ugly, good?" If it does then there is something seriously wrong with your explanation. David Bentley Hart's *Beauty of the Infinite* and others use an aesthetic counter-argument to at least seven schools of postmodern reductive nihilism. If the outcome of a particular world-view becomes ugly or countenances blatant evil then it needs correction. His argument is basically that consideration of God changes and challenges the ugliness of the world with profound and powerful beauty.

The problem that can easily develop is affirming the consequent. If it is beautiful is must be of God. Logically this need not follow, as beauty may also arise without being inherently spiritual. Unfortunately, David Bentley Hart's aesthetic argument in *Beauty of the Infinite*, a magisterial detailed criticism of post-modernism fails because that the book's vocabulary is so prodigiously difficult, that it can only be read with the regular consultation of an extremely good philosophical and technical dictionary.

Critical realism

Critical realism has an inherent commitment to testing and revising how we explain the faith, by testing the explanation against its subject of discussion and investigation. I would describe myself as largely identifying with this approach. This approach has been appealing to a number of scientists turned theologians including McGrath, Polkinghorne, Barbour and Peacocke, and is

used by NT Wright and James Dunn.

In terms of the map metaphor used at the beginning, where scientists find themselves on the spiritual landscape is very similar now as it was a century ago. The spread of belief same amongst scientists in 1904 is the same as in 2004. Apologetics continues to be relevant as a guide about what landmarks to consider.

The critical-realist approach asks whether the assertions and descriptions made about the faith are coherent, consistent and clear. Do they make sense when assessed alongside verifiable evidence? Is that testing and the selection of our descriptions overly influenced by biases or historical assumptions? Are they accurate and have they precision?

Unfortunately this approach is often difficult. Often-times some make it needlessly complex. Some proponents also seem to be making the faith a hostage to the future fortunes of this philosophical movement Yet Christians must be free to analyse and criticise it, just like any school of thought.

Acts of Love & the Power of God

A comprehensive approach to apologetics needs to cover all of these four, and possibly more, approaches to making a case for faith. Also Apologetics must not overlook the key place of the powerfully transformative role of acts of Christlike love and community involvement. These have routinely won the hearts and incorporated people into the life of the community of faith, before people give their intellectual assent.

Nonetheless, when confronted with an act of sacrificial love or a moment of the miraculous, people do not automatically turn closer to God. These acts don't necessarily work on their own without an explanatory framework. The person who has a mountain-top experience or is confronted with the miraculous can often respond "that experience was lovely or powerful" and make no connection to how they then live. In one community in which I lived local churches as an act of love contributed over \$40,000 worth of improvements to a struggling high school in a struggling suburb in their district. We spent the weekend telling people why we were doing it and more and more people joined in. Unfortunately, no one told the local journalists who missed the point and used the event as a Page One angry diatribe against the government.

Apologetics has relevance in helping people develop and build their own explanatory framework for life and living in the spiritual landscape of our world. For those who are not Christian, hopefully it moves them to taking the faith more seriously. For Christians it is to help them deal with healthy doubts about their faith. There is a very real risk that those who do not ask hard questions about their faith will find themselves defenceless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart sceptic. Believers should not only find the answers to their own questions, but also those of the people around them.

Start wherever a person is, suggesting signposts and clues that might get them home. The hope of the gospel is that they are never too far away.

While this article can stand alone, it forms part two of Dr Brennan's paper. The first part was published in ACCatalyst Vol. 7 No. 5 in 2013. Rev Dr Brennan is Minister of the Word at Graceville UCA, Brisbane, QLD

Not a 'fan of Jesus' any more

Patricia Noller reviews a challenging DVD series about putting Jesus first

NOT A FAN is a complete program that challenges and encourages those who are mere fans of Jesus Christ to become completely-committed followers. The program includes a feature-length film, six Bible studies with DVD input (30-40 minutes), and sermon outlines and film clips to be used as part of the Sunday service. There is also a personal journal that can be used, although the program can be run without the use of the journal.

The focus of the program is the text from Luke's gospel: *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me* (Luke 9: 23) as well as Matthew 7: 21, *Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of Heaven but he who does the will of my father.*

The film tells the story of a man called Eric, married to Anna, with two teenage children, Natalie and Tony. Eric's story is the focus of the program. Although Eric attends church on Sunday, he is ruthless in his approach to business, and he and his family live an extravagant lifestyle. Eric also regularly goes out 'on the town' with Gary, his friend from his schooldays. On one such occasion, he and Gary end up in gaol.

At this point, Eric has a non-fatal heart attack that puts him in the hospital. As he recovers, he is confronted by God and begins to understand that he has not really been a completely-committed follower of Jesus Christ, and that he needs to change his lifestyle.

Five years after this nonfatal heart attack, Eric has another heart attack and dies. The focus of the DVDs that accompany the Bible studies is on the reactions of friends and family to his life and death: his friend Gary, his workmate Darren, his wife Anna, his father Bill and his daughter Natalie who all react in very different ways. Anyone who has recently lost a spouse may find the film difficult

the first time they see it. I certainly found it difficult and would have liked a warning, although I was fine with the studies.

There is a small study book with suggested questions for discussing the DVD segment for the particular study, as well as the personal journal, if that is used. All the studies include a passage from the bible that ties into the theme.

The journal is both challenging and demanding. It requires a series of reflections and responses for each day including a morning bible quote, a series of questions for the morning, a noon reminder in the form of a reflection and exercise, an evening reflection and an end of day thought. Not many of the Christian women that I've had in groups would be willing or able to complete such a demanding schedule.

The program was produced in 2010 by City on a Hill Studio and hosted by Kyle Idleman, a pastor and teaching minister from Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Kyle's introductions and commentary are highly engaging but also very challenging. He has an interesting way of using ordinary situations to illustrate spiritual truths that are central to the gospel. For example, he uses a stain on a couch to illustrate the grace of God and his willingness to forgive when we confess our sin.

The film and video clips used a lot of flashbacks and there was no attempt to make clear when a particular segment was occurring (e.g. three years earlier). At times this could be confusing as most of the action took place over a 5-year period and there was not a lot of change in the appearance of people across that time.

Some of us (and perhaps me in particular) were troubled about Eric's failure to spend the necessary time communicating with his wife and family about the changes he was making and the reason he was making them. His wife in particular

reacted with understandable resentment to the changes in their lifestyle, such as selling their mansion and moving to a smaller house, giving away lots of their "stuff" and halving his salary. There was a question, however, that allowed us to explore our reactions to the way that Eric sought to lead his family into closer relationships with Christ.

Nevertheless, the program was positively received. In each of the final sessions I asked participants to comment on the program and their reactions to it. The comments were all positive and focused on the challenge of being a completely committed follower of Jesus Christ. I include some of these comments below. The group members were all women, some in their 40s and 50s and some in their 60s and 70s. Some of the women had been committed Christians for a very long time, others were still at an early stage in their Christian lives. All were challenged in some way.

"It has opened my eyes to the difference between a fan and a follower and the need to be open to his leading for what I am to do next."

"I need to pick up my cross again to fully follow Jesus."

"It has made me realise that I need to focus more on what God wants me to do and to work on how I can show love to others but in a way that brings glory to God."

"I can see many areas in my life where I am sitting back comfortably, resting on my salvation, instead of living out my salvation."

"Challenged me to see how easy it could be to just be a fan. But it would be an empty place to be as a follower has a love relationship with Jesus who is always present, leading, correcting, healing and making new."

In fact, the program provided a challenge for new or struggling Christians and also for those more mature in the faith. I would recommend it for use in bible study groups, whatever the age or stage in the Christian life of those involved.

Patricia Noller is Emeritus Professor, School of Psychology, University of Queensland

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 *ACCatalyst* 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:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to join us

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): \$40.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$70.00 p.a. Contact (02) 9550 5358.

email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com
mail:

PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

What happens next

- March 18-19: National Council meeting in Sydney

- March 21: Cranbourne Cluster gathering

- March 30: Hunter Cluster Gathering

- September 11-13: 2014 AGM and Conference: at Naamaroo Conference Centre, Chatswood NSW

ACC at Prayer

Greetings all and happy New Year! Prayer points for this month:

- Please pray for the National Council and National Convenors face-to-face meeting on the 4-5th March in Newtown, Sydney. We pray for wisdom and direction.
- Other meetings: Feb 16th AC Hunter Cluster Hymns and History at Borragul UC 12: 30 p.m.
- 21st Feb NSW ACC Executive Meeting, Sydney.
- Please pray for Rev. Shane Kammernann and his family as they settle into a new placement in Cairns.
- We pray also for Shane in his role as National Chair and for Peter Bentley as National Director.
- We pray for the Marriage Task Group and for the UCA Assembly's Consultation on Marriage as it continues this year. We pray for our UCA leaders who are heading up these consultations.
- We pray for members of congregations, presbyteries, Synods and members of Assembly to have courage and boldness to stand up for what is right and to speak against those things that are wrong.
- We pray for our ACC congregations throughout Australia as they activate their missional ministries for this year.
- Presbytery of Tasmania has set a "personal discipleship" focus for 2014, to be followed by congregational and wider discipleship themes in following years. We pray that this new focus will bring fruit for local congregations and the wider church as a whole.
- ACC Tasmania is also encouraging local study groups to form and is suggesting the use of N T Wright's Living Faith DVDs to be used in small groups across the Presbytery. These DVDs start from the outside of faith, and allow for fringe members to participate. We thank God for this project and pray for open doors.
- We thank God for the work he has done last year through the ACC as we continue to commit our work into God's hands.

Please email prayer requests to the ACC office for the prayer network coordinator, Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki

FILM



The Railway Man Eric Lomax and thousands of his fellow prisoners of war were forced to build the Burma railway under barbaric and inhumane circumstances.

Challenges for POWs and church leaders

The Railway Man (2013, M)

While not an explicitly Christian film, the strong theme of forgiveness in *The Railway Man* will resonate for ACC readers. Colin Firth is Eric Lomax and Nicole Kidman plays his wife Patti Lomax. Some of you may have read his autobiography of the same name (published in 1995). The process of bringing it to film is a story in itself though the film does not deal with aspects of his family life prior to him meeting Patti whom he would marry in 1983.

During WWII British officer Eric Lomax is captured by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore and ends up working on the Thai-Burma Railway. Apart from the general appalling conditions, Lomax (and many others) was tortured, with a particular incident providing the background to Lomax's torture.

The film weaves back and forth from the war times to the 1980s, illustrating his continuing psychological difficulties, particularly its impact on his second marriage. Eric eventually learns of a book published by one of his captors who is now running a tourist-type memorial (not exploiting the time but attempting to show remorse), and he eventually makes a journey to meet him. The former Japanese officer Takashi Nagase (played by Hiroyuki Sanada), from

the prison camp was an interpreter during the torture sessions.

Laura Barnett in *The Guardian* Film News (24 January 2014 9:30 AM) writes: "The torture scenes are terrifying – and completely realistic ... says torture rehabilitation expert Dr William Hopkins. I saw this film with a colleague who knew Eric Lomax, whose memoir it is based on. He had been a victim of torture, too. "We both found it strikingly realistic: the torture scenes are terrifying without being remotely sensationalist, as can sometimes be the case with film and TV. Both Lomax's experience of torture in a Japanese prisoner of war camp and his ultimate reconciliation with his torturer are put across excellently."

Both men had become aware of the need for forgiveness, but as is often the case one person has to take the first step to reconciliation, and Eric knew he had to offer forgiveness as the only way to stop the hatred that had dominated his life and start to live again.

Twenty Feet From Stardom (2013, M)

This is an unusual film and what a fascinating title. Today children often want to grow up to be a celebrity playing a role, rather than being in the actual role itself. Everyone seems to want their 15 minutes of fame

(though it is more like 1.5 seconds in the world of instant communication today).

This documentary considers some of the backing singers to many well-known and famous later 20th century popular singers (and 21st century). The twenty feet refers to where the backing singers often stood on stage. It shows how integral these singers were to the development of many of the popular and significant pop and rock songs in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and how in some cases they received little recognition or were actually 'covered over', with someone else taking the credit.

This documentary caused me to reflect on the sometimes increasing celebrity culture in the Christian ... arena

It is also worth highlighting that many of these backing singers are Christian—having been trained from a young age to sing in churches, especially those in the Southern USA and African-American tradition. It reminded me of why so many contestants on the increasing number of popular talent shows like *Australian Idol* had a Christian background, especially in larger churches. They gained practical experience and ability to sing in the context of a large audience.

Overall, this documentary caused me to reflect on the sometimes-increasing celebrity culture in the Christian parachurch and denominational arena and the danger in having too much focus on any one person to the neglect of the whole body.

We all have a part to play in the body of Christ. For some it will be an up-front leadership role, but with the whole body involved we can sing together.

Peter Bentley, National Director for the ACC